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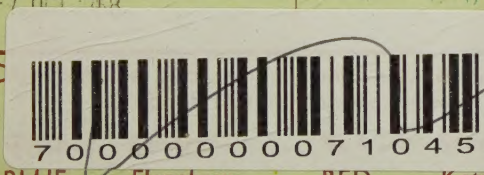

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LAYCOCK OF LONEDALE

WHAT THIS STORY IS ABOUT

Sam Laycock had pawned his life for money and regarded everyone whose life was not devoted to making it as an idler and a waster. In this category he classed his eldest son, Roger, for Roger held there were higher things in life than the accumulation of wealth. Thus, when Sam Laycock came to die, he left his entire estate, valued at one hundred and sixty thousand pounds, to be divided between his sons, James and George, while Roger he cut off with a paltry sum of five thousand. Roger bore no grudge against his father and brothers; instead, he determined to beat them at their own game of money-making, not as an end in itself, but as a means to an end. A powerful story of Yorkshire life.

LAYCOCK OF LONEDALE

BY

W. RILEY

HERBERT JENKINS LIMITED
3 YORK STREET LONDON S.W.1

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FOREWORD

LAYCOCK, Wainwright, Binns—these are common names in the industrial parts of the West Riding, and as some of them are sure to belong to manufacturers and sweet-makers, there will almost certainly be those who will exercise a misplaced ingenuity in seeking to identify their acquaintances with the characters found in the book. Resemblances there may be (for though all my characters are imaginary, I venture to affirm that they are true to type), but if so, they are accidental. The book contains no portraits, past or present, yet it is all portraiture, as many Yorkshire and north-country folk will agree. Some who read will be frank unbelievers, especially in regard to Roger's achievements, which they will consider phenomenal, not knowing how commonplace the phenomenal is in the industrial north, where a genius for money-making is always turning "nobodies" into "somebodies" in the short time that it takes other men to lay the foundations of a business. Many will question Roger's philosophy of life, but there are rich men in Yorkshire and elsewhere whose lives exemplify it—men who are not slaves to their possessions. They are rare enough to be a peculiar people, I admit; but they have discovered the secret of contentment.

W. RILEY.

PERIOD ONE

LAYCOCK OF LONEDALE

CHAPTER I

WHICH IS DEVOTED TO PRELIMINARY EXPLANATIONS

THE story of Roger Laycock and his brothers is staged in the industrial area of the West Riding of Yorkshire, but it has nothing, or, at any rate, little, to do with the great manufacturing towns where machinery clatters unheeded, its sounds merged in the monotonous roar that rises from workshop and factory and paved street; where men and masters go their several ways, and avenued suburbs turn their backs upon mean streets and slums; where those who work with their hands neither know nor care how it fares with those who pay them their wages; where an employer may be "Mister" to his workpeople even behind his back, and must needs inquire of overlooker or foreman before he can address a "hand" by name.

Life is simpler at Carr Side, where Roger was born and found life full and pleasant enough. It was simpler still, though the difference, perhaps, was not very great, in his father's day, for mill-masters were then something of a novelty, and men were living—scores of them—whose fathers had been manufacturers on their own account, each with his own mill in the "chamber" of his cottage home, where he and his family worked at the hand-looms which produced him his "pieces" at the cost of much steady labour.

From the heights of Carr Bank one can look down

upon the green valley of the Aire, but never far without the sight of a factory chimney. Northward the Pennine hills uprear their shadowy forms over a smokeless country, but that is beyond the cradle of the Aire; that is the land of mystery and romance. Romance takes a greyer hue here where the Pennines must bend their broad shoulders to the burdens man imposes, as they have already been compelled to yield their hidden treasures of coal, and therefore from every scattered village on these hillsides that stretch up to the moors, and from the moorland hamlets themselves, there rises at least one tall chimney-shaft that tells of man's mastery and the moor's subjection. But patient Nature smiles at the oppressor, and the upper reaches of the Aire, despite the factories, are still in part pastoral, are still pleasing and attractive if not wholly beautiful.

Those who look for simple-hearted, guileless folk in these villages may find their search rewarded, but such nuggets do not lie before every door. They are men and women of the moor, these villagers, and they have the characteristics of the moor. Hard, keen, obstinate—hard as their ice-bound tracks in winter, keen as the winds out of the north, obstinate as the heather that fire cannot dislodge—they go their own way for good or evil, and the man who takes them for fools may account himself lucky if he be not made to pay the price of his mistake.

Old Roger Wainwright, he who built the first mill in Carr Side, and brought power-looms there under guard of soldiers, beating opposition to its knees without mercy and without ill-will, was a Yorkshireman of this order. He was a just man who bore no grudges, and his ablest opponents became his most trusted and responsible servants, for he was shrewd enough to realise that those who had shown courage and capacity in the fight for their own interests were most likely, when reconciled, to watch over his.

It was because Sam Laycock had made old Roger his hero and exemplar that he named his first-born

son after him, and grieved all the rest of his days when he came to the conclusion that the lad was unworthy: that the hero's mantle was a misfit and an encumbrance. The old mill-master never knew that he was a hero, for Sam was only a lad in the weft-room when the burly manufacturer died and the mills passed into the possession of his only son, Ralph. Ralph belonged to another school. He never forgot that his forbears had been yeomen, gentlemen-farmers and squires. He hated the mill and all mills—hated the smell and the racket; and he married a wealthy wife whose blood was bluer than his own, and who was disdainful of trade and too lofty in her demeanour to be on good terms with her humble neighbours. Ralph was no fool, all the same, and he did himself a good turn when he promoted Sam to the office and held before him the prospect of further promotion. In this way Fate spun the thread that was to weave Sam's fortune.

Before he realised, however, that he was to achieve greatness, Sam made one fateful mistake. When he was twenty-two he married Martha Metcalfe, a sensible, good-natured girl of twenty who worked in the mill, but out of her large charity left her loom in order to nurse Sam's mother (without fee or reward) when the old woman took to her bed for the last time. Martha was what Yorkshire folk call a "homely body"—plump and pleasant, coarse in feature and yet not unattractive; quite satisfied with her station in life, and without any other ambition than to be on good terms with God and her neighbour. Her speech was the broadest of broad Yorkshire; and it was with a "Ger away, wi' ye!" that she first greeted Sam's proposal of marriage. It was with Sam an emotional epoch. His gratitude for the help willingly offered in his time of distress outweighed his discretion. He persisted. "Aw, go on, then!" said Martha; and they married.

It was a disastrous step for Sam, who was a resolute, ambitious young fellow, determined to get on, and who had a master who was willing to smooth the way for

him. There was never a more eager learner than Sam, and his earnestness amused Mr. Ralph, who foresaw that the encouragement of such ardour would bring him considerable relief by and by. He liked the lad; lent him books; welcomed him to the Hall and gave him the run of his library; helped him up the ladder he was so anxious to climb; and found himself rewarded when, in course of time, Sam could interview merchants and secure orders and adjust claims a great deal better than he had ever been able to do himself. And the only fly in the ointment of Sam Laycock's growing satisfaction, but a fly of bluebottle dimensions, was his wife.

Poor Martha was quite unable to climb the ladder in her husband's wake. For her the ladder remained a "stee," and a very unwelcome one, for it would lift her above the comfortable familiarities of life and land her somewhere in the air—in the air which would be cold and empty even if it were inhabited by angels. She had been perfectly happy at her loom; she was miserable at Moor House, where her husband took her the year before Roger was born, and forced her to keep an unnecessary servant-lass, who was sure to be "more bother nor she wor worth." They had been married eight years by this time, and no child had been born to them.

"An' happen as well," she would say, with a sigh that refuted the words; "for if it had braided o' me, our Sam 'ud ha' shamed." She knew her husband.

By this time Sam had a small share in the business, and was known as "t' young gaffer." This act of generosity had been quite unexpected by the hands, and was not received with much favour, for not only was Sam unpopular, but he was at that particular moment under a cloud that ought not to have burst in any such blessing. Betty Binns, the bonniest lass in the weaving-shed, and apparently one of the most modest, had slipped on the path of virtue, and was now hugging something more than trouble. It was

understood that she fathered the burden on Sam; and Sam did not deny the charge, even to his wife.

"I neither deny it nor admit it," he said coldly; but as he was at no pains to hide the payments he made to Betty every quarter, there can be little wonder that his guilt was never questioned. He was untroubled by hostile looks and harsh criticism. Sentiment was coin he had never valued and would never miss, and he probably never asked himself what effect the disclosure would have on his relations with his wife. It would be exaggeration to affirm that she was broken hearted, but she was humiliated. She never forgave him until Roger was born, and in the joy of that unlooked-for occurrence she allowed herself to forget, which is the final seal of forgiveness.

The days now glowed for Martha with a new light, and her husband's increasing coldness left her unmoved. She would have no nurse for the child—what need was there for paid service when she was still young and strong, and had a bony wench like 'Liza in the kitchen? The child was a god-send, an answer to faithless prayer. He excused attendance at the "parties" (as she called all social functions), where she brought disgrace on her husband by her broad speech and lack of refined manners. He filled the gap in her heart, where there had been a great aching for love. He made life worth living for four years; and then life suddenly ended.

She had been romping vigorously with Roger when 'Liza, looking on tolerantly from the doorway, saw her mistress press her hand to her heart and sink down on the lawn. The child flung himself upon his mother in glee at this new form of play, and when 'Liza hurried up to ask what was amiss her mistress was beyond speech, and only her eyes told the anguish of her heart. In that posture she died.

Her death gave Sam his freedom. He was now a man of thirty-five, gentlemanly in appearance and in manners; of slow, incisive speech; unexcelled among market-men; obstinate but straightforward;

trusted and respected, but not liked, by his employees (who would have forgiven his exaltation if he had not exalted himself), and greatly esteemed by his senior partner, Mr. Ralph Wainwright, who concerned himself less and less with a business which never failed to prosper under Sam's management. When Sam proposed marriage to Ethel Wainwright, the mill-master's daughter, in the second year of his widowerhood, and was accepted, nobody was greatly surprised except the girl's mother, and she was grievously disappointed and annoyed.

Mr. Ralph, however, was pleased. He now withdrew from the business altogether, and the mills formed Ethel's dowry. The Wainwrights were very wealthy, and could afford to be generous. A bargain was struck, and Sam became sole proprietor of the old-established firm of Roger Wainwright and Son.

Before the year was out Sam was the father of a second son, and the prosperous manufacturer bought Carr Hall and staffed it with servants. Two years later there came a third son, and after a similar interval a daughter. Sam was now as contented as his nature permitted him to be, and could devote himself with an easy mind to the only object in life that was worth while—the making of more and more money.

Well, he made it ; not without effort and yet easily ; and but for Roger no cold wind of discontent would have brought a blight upon his satisfaction. Roger, however, was a disappointment, a disgrace—a Metcalfe, as the father told himself indignantly and contemptuously. It was not that the lad was unintelligent, for he was quick enough when the task and the inclination were conjoined, but such tasks were usually self-appointed, and of a very different nature from those the schoolmaster and his father set him. The moor had a stronger attraction for him than the multiplication-table : the mill stream than the mill itself : the company of his mother's " folk " than that of the local grandees who sipped wine or tea at his father's table,

and who quite obviously regarded him as a dunce and a misfortune.

"Poor Ethel's cross!" some lady once called him. "Such a contrast to her own, sweet, bright children!"

It must be admitted that the stepmother would not have rebelled if Providence had seen fit to return the child to his own mother, but she was not unkind to the lad, and did her best for him, or what she took to be her best. Roger repaid her with affection, regarding her, however, not as his mother, but as a superior being whom his wonderful father had purchased with money to replace his other wife, just as he had replaced the homely drawing-room furniture of Moor House by the gilded chairs and inlaid tables and cabinets of the new imposing apartment.

With advancing years stepmother and stepson drew farther apart, though neither of Mrs. Laycock's own sons was as quick as Roger to anticipate their mother's wishes and render her thoughtful attention; but this could not atone for his lack of polish and defiance of the social code. Ethel became more and more wrapped up (as Yorkshire folk say) in her own children, and particularly in the two boys, who were lithe and graceful in body, quick at their studies, and perfectly at ease in any company. Neither of them "favoured" his father, but each had the build and colour and features of the Wainwrights; and each had been trained by example, though not by precept, to despise the big, loutish brother whose willingness to fetch and carry for them put him in the same category as the servants. The father, too, was very proud of his younger sons, and never troubled to hide his preference, so that Roger found life easier when both boys went to Oxford, where the topstone was to be put on their education and their father's vanity. When they returned and were given positions in the mill superior to his own, he smiled and found consolation in his thoughts and his fishing-nets.

It was the rule, then, in the household to ignore Roger, to treat him as if he scarcely existed, but there

was one who broke the rule—Roger's half-sister, Florence.

Roger was ten years old when she was born, and even as an infant she purled with pleasure whenever she caught sight of him, and would lie contentedly in his arms for half-an-hour on end, to the great satisfaction of her nurse. In Florence the Laycock strain reappeared. She had her father's sandy hair, his blue eyes set deep in the head, his firm lips. She was, indeed, a copy of Roger, cast in a more delicate mould and lacking the coarse features and deep chin that the boy inherited from his mother; and their souls were twin. Mother and nurse quickly discovered that the only punishment that was effective with Roger was to deny him the opportunity to play with Floss, as he insisted on calling her; to roll with her on the lawn, to carry her on his back or shoulders, to be her humble and obedient slave. And to deny the child these ministrations was to send her into a passion of tears and violent remonstrances which usually secured the speedy pardon of the culprit. When she went away to school Roger was disconsolate; but, happily for him, her absence was not of long duration. Mrs. Laycock developed a lingering illness, and Florence came home to be her mother's companion and mouthpiece. When the girl became mistress of the household in her nineteenth year, the Hall had never been so homelike for Roger.

Sam Laycock was fifty-nine when his second wife died, and the bereavement embittered him. He became moody. The figure that had been so familiar in the roomy pew at church was now seldom seen there. He still walked down to the mill, and sat at his desk, but refused to see more than an occasional customer, delegating his duties and prerogatives to his sons James and George, and totally ignoring Roger, who showed no resentment, and was perfectly happy so long as he had a fishing-rod or gun in his hands and was not disturbed in his courtship of Mary Standfast.

The mill-master certainly did not disturb him. It

was all of a piece with the undutiful conduct to which everybody was accustomed : with the low, unambitious spirit which was bred in him, and which he was apparently determined to encourage. Sam washed his hands of his first-born and treated him with con temptuous indifference ; and all the little community of Carr Side and all similar communities for miles round asked themselves what was likely to happen to Roger when Sam Laycock, who was failing fast, poor chap ! should die. And Roger asked himself the question, for he was no fool ; and because he was afraid his motives would be misconstrued, made no nearer approach to his father, sought no understanding with him, allowed a certain aloofness to cover the pity his heart held for the stern strong man who was drooping, like a sturdy tree riven by a thunderbolt.

Roger asked the question because he was a man nearing thirty now, and must face his responsibilities ; but whether he was to be the head of the business or the tail was of little moment. The only treasure he was anxious to possess was hidden away in the neighbouring village of Lonedale, and it was treasure which poverty was more likely to buy than riches. With that treasure he would be wealthy : without it, poor. So he told himself, as young men have done and will do, but none more sincerely than Roger. Riches were nothing to him, but he was probably destined to be rich, and Mary knew it. It was the rock of offence that stood between them and threatened the shipwreck of his hopes, and he did not see how it was to be removed. Mary knew his mother's story, and was afraid of riches.

Hour after hour as he fished the problem occupied his thoughts, and took the colour of his occupation. Some fish, he reflected, rose to gaudy flies and some to the humble earthworm. He was a humble earthworm in spirit, but the gaudy trappings with which his father's wealth encumbered him frightened the fish away. It was a bad job ; a very bad job !

Sam survived his wife five years and died at sixty-

four. Roger was thirty-three; James and George respectively twenty-seven and twenty-five; Florence on the eve of her twenty-third birthday.

The funeral had been stately and impressive, with crowds of mill operatives and villagers preceding the hearse, and an imposing array of private carriages following it. Most of the gentry of the neighbourhood were there, together with a number of important-looking gentlemen in silk hats from the big town fourteen miles away.

When the family was at last alone, the will was produced and expounded by the firm's lawyer, Mr. Henry Clutterton (Clutterton, Sons and Nephew, of Broadbeck), a grim-faced man with pendulous cheeks, and a mouth that drooped at the corners as if the delivery of unwelcome tidings had permanently depressed it. He read with clear, cold articulation and glanced momentarily at each individual whose name was mentioned.

Florence Wainwright Laycock found herself the possessor of Moor House and the sum of twenty-five thousand pounds, which might be retained in the business at five per cent. interest at the discretion of her two brothers, James Wainwright and George Wainwright Laycock. The Hall and its contents passed to James, and the residue of the estate, together with the good-will of the business of Roger Wainwright and Son to James and George in equal shares, "subject only to the payment in cash of five thousand pounds to my eldest son, Roger, to whom I also bequeath my dogs and guns, the oil painting entitled 'The Rich Young Ruler,' and the engraving after Hogarth of 'Industry and Idleness.'"

It is at this point, then, that the story of Roger Laycock and his brothers may conveniently open.

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH THE LEGATEES EXPRESS THEIR MINDS

THE lawyer leaned back in the chair and by his glances seemed to invite questions. The faces of the two younger sons twitched nervously, and were almost colourless. They were sufficiently alike to be recognized easily as brothers, rather handsome in a general way, though without any strong lines of character in their features. Each had his gaze fixed on the documents spread before the lawyer, and each had a strained look in his eyes. James's hands were tightly clasped and stretched out upon the table. Of the two he was distinctly the more nervous, but discomfort embodied itself in both.

Florence's face was flushed, and anger turned the blue of her eyes to steel. They had been wet with tears at the graveside ; but in the heat of her resentment the reservoir had dried and was likely to fill again only from another source. She was leaning over the table, glancing impatiently at the faces of her two brothers, and more than once had checked the impulse to speak. At last she turned to the lawyer.

"How much has father left ?"

Mr. Clutterton pursed his lips and spoke indulgently.

"That, my dear young lady, is what we have now to ascertain ; but at my last interview with your father, only a few weeks ago, he roughly calculated the value of his estate at one hundred and sixty thousand pounds. More or less, of course—more or less."

"And he's left a paltry five thousand to Roger! It's a burning, wicked shame!"

Her own face was burning, and under cover of her indignation the others ventured to steal a glance at Roger, who was maintaining his chair at a precarious angle on its two back legs. His hands were thrust into his pockets, and a good-tempered smile broke over his face at his sister's outburst, bringing the relief of sunshine into the gloom of the library.

"Steady on, old girl!" he said. "A lot of father's brass, you must bear in mind, came to him with your mother; and though I'd happen a right to expect a bit more than I'm to get, the old man has done me a good turn without knowing it. So there's no need for you all to be pulling such long faces. I've no grudge against any of you, for even if it looks a bit shabby, it isn't anything you've done."

"It's something we can undo," said Florence, as her brothers remained silent. "If James and George are honest men, they'll see you get your fair share. You'll get some of mine, anyway—I'll see to that!"

"Naught o' the sort!" said Roger, with easy good humour. "Five thousand's as much brass as I want, and if it isn't I'll borrow some of you, Floss. What good is a lot o' brass? What good has it done father? He's tewed and toiled for it, early and late, ever since he was breeched, and what has he got out of it? Meat and drink that he could scarce thoil time to swallow! Two or three suits o' clothes to swop into! A bed that owed him sixty minutes o' valuable time for every hour he spent on it, and never paid up! A house three times as big as he needed, with a lot o' servants that plagued his life out! I'll bet every quid of my five thousand that he didn't get half nor quarter as much pleasure out o' life as my uncle Steve gets. And he's had to leave it when done."

His brothers exchanged contemptuous glances, and George's face regained its colour and harboured an amused smile. James remained solemn and watchful.

Roger brought his chair down to its four legs and safety, and turned to his sister.

"Jim is boss here now, I reckon," he said, "but he'll let you fiddle the tune out till he moves in. You'd better give Mr. Clutterton a cup of tea before he goes. His throat will be dry after all that rigmarole of law-stuff."

The lawyer brushed the suggestion aside. Cups of tea were nothing to his taste, and he had already had as much wine as good breeding allowed him to accept. He folded his papers carefully, deposited them in the black handbag that lay open-mouthed at his feet like a small, thirsty dog, and pushed back his chair.

"You'll maybe never have had a good look at this picture he's left me, have you, Mr. Clutterton?" Roger inquired. "You'll have seen it, of course, but you mayn't have examined it carefully. It has a look of Jim, don't you think? I'm glad to have it, though I'm blest if I know what I'm going to do with it."

"It will go to Moor House, of course," said Florence, with characteristic decision. "Where else should it go? That will be your home as long as you want one."

"Right, old girl! We'll take it up to-night," said Roger. "Stand over here, Mr. Clutterton, and you'll get it in a good light. It's one of Tempest's best, and must have cost somebody a pot o' money. Now don't you see a likeness to Jim?"

The lawyer stood where he was instructed, though with manifest reluctance. He did not venture to look at James, but stared at the picture through his pince-nez, which he held at a distance of a couple of inches from his eyes. "Umph!" was all he said.

The picture was a large one, occupying the whole of the space between the mantelpiece and the brass rail from which it was suspended; and it had a haunting attractiveness. The young ruler, richly but not extravagantly clothed, stood on a broad high-road,

bordered on one side with grass and a low hedge, half-hidden by trailing flowers. Here all was light, though the brightness was that of moonbeams. There was a wall on the other side, low as the hedge, affording a glimpse of a stony moor that stretched away to dimly-discerned, black mountains. A scarcely-trodden path that began at a narrow stile in the wall could be followed by the eye for a little way, and was then lost in the shadows. The sky was obscured by clouds, save where a narrow rift above the horizon revealed a wash of rosy pink that told of daybreak. Behind the figure of the man all was obscure: a dark mist.

The young ruler was alone. His hands were clasped before him at the full stretch of his arms, and he was staring into vacancy with eyes filled with pain and yearning—eyes that seemed to have been strangers to sleep and witnesses of heartache. Wherever you might stand in the room, those eyes followed you, but never found yours: never found rest: always gazed into space beyond and above you. James's expression was there, as well as his eyes.

"Umph!" the lawyer repeated, uneasily.

"I never made out why he bought it," Roger continued. "Somebody got round him, I suppose; unless he took it for a bad debt, and there are more unlikely things than that. I suppose he thought if I got it, it 'ud talk to me—it and the 'Industry and Idleness'—but what he expected it to say hasn't come to me yet. Perhaps it will splutter out something the old man never thought of one of these days. One thing you can gamble on, and that is that it won't be for sale—not at any price."

The lawyer said "Umph!" again. He was ill at ease and anxious to be gone. The picture had somehow unnerved him. He had meant to congratulate the two younger men who had inherited the bulk of their father's wealth with his full approval, but he forgot to do so. It struck him later as a curious fact that until they bade him good-day, neither of them had broken silence. Their tongues were loosened, however

when he left the room in Roger's company, though even then Florence was the first to speak.

"I call it downright mean of father to play Roger a trick like that," she began hotly; "tossing him a few sovereigns from his death-bed and putting that nasty, spiteful bit in about 'Industry and Idleness.' And for you two to sit there like two effigies, never once opening your lips, was just contemptible!"

James bent a stern, steady gaze on the girl's flushed face, but George laughed and lit a cigarette. Now that their features had relaxed, the likeness between the two was not quite so apparent, but the dissimilarity was that of character rather than of physical mould.

"Father wasn't the man to put his money into a bag with holes," said James coldly. "He was a man of sound judgment, and not one who acted on impulse. I'm sorry for Roger, but if you think I'm going to be so unfilial as to challenge father's wisdom and undo what may have been—what will have been—a carefully thought-out act, you'll be disappointed, for I shall do nothing of the kind."

"Besides," broke in George, in a much more light-hearted tone, "Roger isn't a Wainwright when all is said and done, and it's the Wainwrights who set the business going. The mills were theirs, the capital was theirs, everything was theirs."

"Father's brains weren't theirs, anyhow," interrupted Florence, in a voice as dry as that of her brother James.

"A pity he couldn't have left them to Roger, then," laughed George. "His head's big enough to hold 'em, and what he has of his own wouldn't be crushed."

Anger flamed in the girl's eyes, but she restrained herself and forced a contemptuous laugh to her lips.

"You're my own brothers, but I'm ashamed of you both. How you can be so heartless, so selfish and indifferent to one who has always been good to you, I can't think. Roger is worth a hundred of you! You take him for a brainless fool—it's you who are

the fools! I can tell you one thing: if Roger will take it, and I'm only afraid he won't, he shall have half my money."

"You are hysterical, Flo," said James. He was still sitting at the table, but he was master of himself now. One would have said that the situation had begun to afford him a measure of enjoyment. "You are as sentimental over Roger as if he were a lover; and it will be my duty and George's to save you from yourself and to prevent you, as far as we can, from interfering with our father's designs. My first feeling was that it would be best to rid ourselves at once of the liability of your twenty-five thousand, but I now see, and George will agree with me, that for your own sake it will be wiser to keep the money in the business. I daresay father foresaw something of this sort when he made the provision. I'm sorry, I repeat, for Roger; but if it's true that a man reaps what he sows, it's also true that if a man won't sow, he mustn't expect to reap."

"By gad, Jim!" said George, "you've put that rather neatly, and I'm with you all the way except that I don't pretend to be sorry for Roger. What is there to be sorry for——?"

"Aye, what is there to be sorry for Roger for?" a rougher, heartier voice inquired. Roger had returned unperceived, and one quick glance at the faces of the three had told him quite plainly how matters stood. With all their reading, the two younger men had never been able to read their brother, or they would have known that behind that round, placid face, which but for its placidity and good humour, was so like their father's, there was a quicker intelligence, a shrewder judgment, than they possessed even in combination.

It was May, but the days were still cold and a neglected fire was burning in the handsome grate. Roger brought the embers together and stirred them into a blaze. Not only so, but he took the brush that hung on a huge brass tripod at one corner of the hearth,

and swept the litter of ash and cinder underneath the bars. It was a custom that always aroused his brothers' contempt—a menial act that proclaimed the Metcalfe.

"That's better!" he said, as he drew up his father's easy chair and dropped into its deep luxuriousness. "Let's have some tea, Floss. Whether old Clutterton was dry or not, I am. And when we've rinsed our throttles, we'd better talk things over and see where we are. Isn't that so, lads?"

James nodded. He didn't like the way in which Roger appropriated that particular chair and the leadership of the conversation. Roger apparently had not yet appreciated the indisputable fact that he was now bottom dog, and very much bottom dog; that the chair in which he was making himself so much at home belonged to him—James; and that he—James—in the spirit of their father's will, was the one who ought to have initiated a discussion. George, who had turned his back upon the company, and was looking languidly out of the window, knew by intuition what was passing through his brother's mind, but was only amused. James was inclined to carry a little too much side—would be more likely than ever to do so now that he was master at the Hall—Roger's nonchalant overlordship, which, in the circumstances, could be only temporary, was an agreeable corrective to James's superiority.

"Now, then," said Roger, when tea had been brought in and they were again alone. "We'd better begin straight away to size things up and know how we stand with one another. Somebody's been saying they're sorry for me? That's so, isn't it? Well, I know Floss is, and I guess Jim says he is, but George makes no bones about it—he isn't?"

"I'm sorry you haven't had sense enough to look after yourself," George explained, "sense enough to keep on the right side of the old man. You've had the same chance we had; in fact, you've had a better chance, for you've been in the mill ever since you left

school; but when a fellow fools his opportunities, what's the use of being sorry for him?"

"And what about you, Jim?"

"I can only repeat what I said in your absence," said James. Roger's unaffected good-humour disturbed him, and it was this, perhaps, that made his voice hard and his half-closed eyes unsympathetic. "I'm sorry for you, because to be left with five thousand pounds is a humiliation that can't be hidden from anybody. Everyone who knows us will know that you've been punished—punished for slackness. They'll know that our father—I'm sorry George allows himself to follow your example in calling him 'the old man'—had no confidence in you. It's the humiliation your own conduct has brought on you that causes my pity. You won't starve on five thousand pounds if you live carefully and don't touch the principal; but, relatively, of course, you're a poor man; and as it was evidently father's wish that you should be poor Flo won't persuade me to vary or modify the provision he has made by his will——"

"Well, now," interrupted Roger, "you've made your mind a sight plainer than old Clutterton made father's, and I'm not going to ask Floss to say what she thinks about it all, because I know, and by the look of your faces when I came in, she'd been telling you I'm just going to let you know what I think, and I'll put it as plain as big print, with no 'aforesaids' or 'hereinbefores' to muddle my meaning.

"Look you, what I said when the lawyer was here just now is every word true. I wouldn't live as father lived if I could make ten sovereigns where he made one. Live! He never had time to live! He carried his looms home on his back when the engine stopped, and had a spinning-frame in bed with him when he lay down to sleep! The hum o' machinery was all the music he cared for, because it hummed brass And what pleasure did it bring him? He pawned his life for brass, that's what father did; and now that he'll have got his life out o' pawn, he won't know

what to do with it. And if that isn't hell, it's a funny sort of heaven!"

"I don't want to interrupt you, Roger," said James, with magisterial severity, "but I hope you'll have some regard for the decencies in what you have to say."

"Aye, I'll be decent," returned Roger. "If I've said what isn't true, you can pick me up. Now I'll tell you what's the best thing father has left us—all of us. Sound bodies! I don't grudge you your brass —nay, it's right what I was telling you, that he did me more good when he cut me off with what Floss calls a paltry five thousand, than if he'd left me equal shares with you two. I could ha' danced when I heard the figures. No; I'll be fair to him; he owed me no brass, and if he'd left me three instead of five, I should have said the same; but he owed me a clean body, and that he gave me. I want nought no more, and you two—you three—are as welcome to his brass as a meadow's welcome to its buttercups."

James smiled, and the smile was in itself a comment.

"Father thought that life was industry; Roger thinks it is sport," he said. "How would the world be clothed and fed and housed if we all lay on our backs and watched the clouds roll by? There may have been room for idle apprentices in the days when all men were cave-dwellers, but in these days——"

He did not complete the sentence for Florence interrupted him with a savage exclamation.

"Cat! If I were Roger, I'd get up and thrash you! You know well enough that Roger isn't idle, and it was a wicked, cruel thing of father to name that picture——!"

"Gently, lass, gently!" Roger broke in. "Don't you worry your head over that picture, or over what your brothers think about me. Why, bless your life, I've more of my father in me than both of them put together, and if I wanted to make brass, you bet I'd beat 'em at their own game—beat 'em hollow. But I don't. I mean to live and enjoy my life, and

I guess I can manage it on five thousand—with the help of that picture."

He glanced meaningly above the mantelpiece and let his eyes remain there. "I fancy that lad's brass weighed more than he'd strength to carry," he went on. "If my bit hurts me as much as his seems to be hurting him, I'll make you a present of it, Jim."

"I'm much obliged to you." James's tone was caustic and rather weary. "And now that we seem to understand Roger's mind, it might be as well to get on to something more practical. Where are you all going to live when I move in here? At Moor House, I suppose?"

"Of course!" said Florence.

"I may as well tell you," George remarked from the window, "I shall want a house of my own to bring my wife to. I'm married!"

The announcement thus jauntily made brought a sudden breeze into the heavy atmosphere of the library. James's face hardened further and again became grey. He turned quickly in his seat, startled for once out of his careful composure.

"Married!" he almost shouted. "Then I dare swear you've made a silly fool of yourself. When were you married, and to whom?"

"Don't try the Lord High Executioner on me, Jim," George replied lightly; "and please have some regard for the decencies in your comments. I've been married six months or more, and who my wife is you shall know when I bring her."

"We'll know now," said James. All his coolness had left him, and he was angrily apprehensive. "If it isn't somebody you're ashamed of you wouldn't have kept the matter secret, and waited until father was dead before you dare reveal it. Flo, make him say who it is!"

This evidence of weakness brought a smile to Roger's face, but it was not reflected on his sister's. Florence's eyes were fixed on George. She had been startled, but

was not angry, though she, too, was nervously apprehensive.

"George will tell us when it pleases him," she said coldly.

"Must *I* tell them, George?" Roger asked, with a sly glance at his younger brother.

"You can if you're clever enough to know the unknown," he replied.

"I'm clever enough to put one and one together and make 'em two," returned Roger banteringly; "and that's you and Rosie Mahoney. Bull's-eye, isn't it?"

He gave a loud roar of laughter at George's crestfallen face, and laughed again when George inquired angrily who had been spying on him.

"It isn't a question of who has spied on you, or of how Roger has guessed your secret," James put in in his coldest tones. "It's a question of what explanation you have to offer for bringing this disgrace upon us. What will our grandmother Wainwright say when she hears that a dancing-girl has been introduced into the family?"

"You call her a dancing-girl again," shouted George, who found it a relief to be able to let himself go, "and I'll land you one between the eyes. She's my wife, remember, whatever she may have been before, and I shall expect you to treat her with respect. If you don't——" He mumbled something which nobody heard—futile threats which nobody would have heeded.

"If you expect Edie and me to receive her on equal terms, and I think I may include Flo as well," said James icily, "you will find yourself mistaken. Roger may be friendly, and he may take a wife who won't share our scruples, but I tell you straight you needn't bring her here."

Despite his deliberation—and he was more than ordinarily deliberate—he was too angry to weigh his words carefully, and to realise that he was isolating himself from the sympathies of all three.

"You must speak for yourself," said Florence,

without either warmth or bitterness. "I know nothing much about the girl, and until this moment I haven't wanted to."

"You can all go——!"

"Shut up, lad!" said Roger pleasantly. "You've dropped your bomb, and the explosion's over without anybody being killed. Let it stop at that. If I get a wife that won't look at yours, I shall have made a big mistake, but it's likely enough the boot'll be on the other foot. It makes no difference to me if Rosie's danced both on her head and her feet—not it! What'll matter is what sort of a wife she'll make, and what sort of a mother to your bairns. I'll wish you much happiness, anyway. Nobody can do less than that!"

"You're mistaken," said James. "*I* can do less. None of you stop to think how this would have affected our father. George knew, and held his coward's tongue. And he was wise, for he was well aware that a man like father would never have given an equal share in the business to the husband of a spendthrift like Rosie Mahoney. I tell him to his face he has stolen his inheritance—got it by false pretences."

George's face was scarcely less white than his brother's, and he held his hands tightly clenched as if he meant to strike. All at once, however, he relaxed them and laughed mirthlessly.

"You'll have to swallow what you can't chew," he said. "I wasn't going to run any risks—not I. If I'm a fool, I'm not such a fool as all that: not fool enough for a strait-jacket. But there's one thing I'm not having: I'm not having any more jaw about spendthrifts and dancing-girls. Rosie Mahoney is Rosie Laycock now, and she's not in a state of health to be jawed at, either. We're equal partners, you and I, Jim; and unless you're hunting trouble, you'll keep on good terms with me and not raise my dander. If you do, you'll suffer for it!"

He was about to leave the room when Roger seized his arm and swung him back.

"Sit down," he said. "There's lots o' things to

talk about besides Rosie. If you're married, you're married, and Jim'll have to get used to it. He didn't ask either you or me when he got wed, and I reckon a man doesn't marry to please his family. If he was forced to do, we should be overrun with spinsters more than we are with rabbits. Now, come!"

They came—sullenly, reluctantly; and it was Roger who guided the business and straightened out the tangled threads.

* * * * * * *

James was sulky when the conversation ended and the two younger men were alone. George laughed and was inclined to banter.

"Our disinherited brother seems to think he can rule the roost," he remarked; "and I'm darned if he hasn't done."

"'Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall,'" James remarked petulantly. "In bequeathing him those two pictures, father symbolised Roger's character—he's the idle young ruler; but he isn't going to rule over me, I can tell you!"

"By Jove, Jim!" said George; "if only you weren't so darned smug, I should admire you. You have your moments of inspiration! The idle young ruler! That's a good 'un for Roger!"

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH ROGER VISITS BETTY BINNS

CARR Side, where the Wainwright mills were situated, stretches its rows of grey houses for a considerable distance on both sides of the broad, well-metalled high road that climbs the lower slopes of Carr Bank until it reaches the comparatively level moorland that spreads over the Yorkshire border into Lancashire. In a hollow below the level of the road and at the western end of the village another cluster of houses huddles together beside the beck and forms Carr Bottom. This is the oldest and most picturesque portion, but though there are beauty spots quite near at hand Carr Bottom itself is not beautiful. Still it has its attractions. To begin with there is the beck which runs through it, singing its song of the breezy moors as it ripples past the cottages; catching the sunlight and throwing it back again; always pleasant and talkative, and always in a hurry. Then the streets and the houses are not so stiff and formal as those up above on the roadside. The streets run at right angles and acute angles and obtuse angles, and the windows of the houses peep here and there and everywhere, instead of staring straight in one direction like a squad of soldiers on parade. There is a homely look about the place, an air of neighbourliness, that is very inviting. You seem warranted in expecting that the good folk who live down there will be a milder-mannered, better-tempered, easier going people than

those who occupy the monotonously uniform houses that border the highway, and who swallow its dust.

In one of the pleasantest of these small cottages : one that kept its two small eyes fixed on the stream for pleasure and the road for profit, Betty Binns lived with her son, Sam, now a man of thirty-nine. Except when the weather was unusually stormy the door of the cottage stood wide open all through the day so that the very tiniest customer, with arms much too short to reach the latch, might not be debarred from entering, and withdrawing with a ha'porth of the famous butterscotch which Betty made and offered for sale. Whether the villagers liked Betty the better because of her butterscotch, or her butterscotch the better because of Betty, it might not be possible to determine, but both were prime favourites. The butterscotch—well, there never was such butterscotch. It was a sweet to be sucked deliberately, lest its fine flavour should be wasted, as the fragrance of scent is lost if it is distributed too freely ; but it was not a sweet to be tucked away at the side of the mouth or beneath the tongue for an interval, because its delicate sweetness was so seductive that even a pillar-hermit would have found it impossible to keep his tongue from caressing it until there was nothing left to caress. Other people made butterscotch, but it was not like Betty's, and how she did it remained a mystery. When she was asked she only smiled.

Sam said its sweetness and delicacy came from her own nature, and that was why nobody else could rival it ; and even if it were held that Sam was a biassed witness it must be admitted, and would have been in Carr Bottom, that Betty was the dearest and most delightful old woman in Airedale. Old, do I say ? Well, she was a few months short of sixty-four, and therefore, not really old at all ; but her hair was white, and the little cap she wore could not conceal its whiteness, and her movements were slow because of rheumatism, and she was the repository of large stores of homely wisdom, so perhaps it does not matter very much if folk called her old.

Her face, however, was young, because it was almost

always bright. Her eyes were mirrors of a kind, large-hearted soul, and had always a sparkle in them. A smile played about the corners of her lips even when she was reading or knitting or bending over the pan which contained the ingredients of the famous butter-scotch, so that it had not to be summoned from a distance, or disinterred from the shades, to be a mere ghost of a smile, when it was called upon for service. There was still a little soft pink in the cheeks which were pleasantly round, and if someone had told you that Betty had been a bonny lass years before you would have had no difficulty in believing it. Her form had lost its graceful outlines, but she was not a bad figure of a woman even yet in spite of her ailment; and if she carried more weight than was really necessary, Sam would have told you that it was because her heart was of gold—twenty-two carat: the slight percentage of alloy being necessary to prevent the formation of wings.

Sam was admittedly prejudiced. He had never married, because he had never been able to find a girl who could hold a candle to his mother; yet, in the eyes of stately Mrs. Wainwright and Mrs. James Laycock, Betty was a "fallen woman," from whom, as respectable Christians, they felt it an obligation to avert their eyes.

There was a refinement about Betty that revealed itself in her speech and manners as well as in her features. If Samuel Laycock had married her instead of Martha Metcalfe, he would have had no reason to "shame" for his wife, for she would have accompanied him step by step on his upward journey. But though she might have adorned his home it is doubtful if she would have been as happy there as she was in her humble cottage.

The cloth was spread on the round table and Betty was making toast before the fire, and humming a cheerful hymn-tune when a hearty "Now, Betty!" from the open doorway gave her such a start that the slice of bread fell from the fork among the ashes.

Now look you there!" she exclaimed, as the smile uncurled itself and spread over her face.

The newcomer laughed. "Flour keeps its price up, Betty, but seemingly bread's coming down!" he said, as he stooped and recovered the toast. Then he bent and kissed the cheek which had borrowed a rosier glow from the hot fire. "Why, you're blushing like a young lass!" he added.

"Blushing fiddlesticks!" she replied. "It's because I'm cross at the waste o' good bread—that's what it is!"

"Waste! There'll be no waste," said Roger. "That piece'll go on to my plate. They all tell me I'm short o' grit, so it'll none hurt me to swallow a bit. Now you just keep still while I cut another slice or two off the loaf and reach an extra cup and saucer down."

"Nay, but you shouldn't make me jump like that!" said Betty. "Coming in like a cat on tip-toe. But you did right to come, bless you! and if I hadn't been so clumsy I shouldn't have dropped the bread. I was thinking of Sam."

"I'll warrant you were," said Roger, who had lifted the kettle on to the bars and was now measuring tea into a little brown teapot as if he were perfectly at home in the house. "What's up with Sam this time?"

"Same old thing, love. No chance of getting on at the Co-op and hates wearing a white apron and having them call him 'Gentleman Sam!' He's always been above his job, has Sam."

"Aye," said Roger. "Sam's one o' them fellows who'd sooner go up to the top floor in a lift than walk up the steps; and as there isn't a lift at the Co-op he stops on the ground-floor. He surprises me. Now if *I* wanted to get on there's naught 'ud hold me back, and that seems curious when we both had the same father."

Betty was silent and went on with her toasting, whilst Roger continued.

"I should have been in to see you before now, Betty, but I waited till we got him buried——"

"Yes, love," said Betty. "I knew you'd be busy. Sam told me what a wonderful funeral it was."

"Aye, he was a wonderful man, was father, and he did some wonderful things, but no more wonderful than some of the things he didn't do." Roger hesitated, and glanced uneasily at Betty. "I hoped to bring you and Sam some good news, Betty; but I shame to tell you he hasn't left either of you a blessed bawbee. He's dead, so we'll let him rest and say no more about it. He very likely knew that I should take care you got a bit."

A cloud came over Betty's eyes and the smile crept away to find shelter. Without saying a word she buttered the toast, and as the meal was now ready she turned to the table and filled the two cups.

"We'll just ask a blessing, Roger, shall we?"

He looked at her a little anxiously as he began his meal. She seemed intent on her thoughts, but the cloud grew no heavier though the smile did not return. By and by she raised her head.

"I've been wondering whether I ought to tell you, love," she said, "and I've decided that I will, only it's to go no further—it's just between you and me. As long as your father lived my lips were closed, but it's only fair you should know we've no claim on him, me and Sam, and never have had. It wasn't your father did me a wrong—it was his master."

A half slice of toast was on its way to Roger's mouth but he laid it on his plate.

"Mr. Ralph?" he exclaimed. "Are you telling me that Sam's father was Ralph Wainwright?"

"It was Mr. Ralph," she repeated. Not one bite had she yet taken, nor had she raised the full cup to her lips. "Your father was never a man o' that sort. He wasn't one to take liberties with anybody, and he wasn't a man 'at I was afraid of—not in that way. But it was another thing with Mr. Ralph. He was like the king to me, and I dare no more have crossed him than if he had been king. I was young, and as frightened as a bird if he as much as looked at me, though I was twenty-three——"

She stopped, for she was not sure that Roger was listening. His eyes sparkled with amusement, and a

smile twisted his lips into a humorous curve. He had evidently been following the train of his own thoughts and was unaware of the cloud shadows that had darkened Betty's face and brought a note of sadness into her voice.

"I can't get over that," he said laughingly, "—Ralph Wainwright to have been Sam's father! By George, Betty, I'd give a fiver to see old Mrs. Wainwright's face if somebody was to tell her—it 'ud be as good as a play! It would suit me right well to bring her pride down a peg. And Mrs. James!—Good lord!"

Betty laid her hand on his arm.

"It's to go no further, Roger. Even Sam doesn't know, and it must be me that tells him—one o' these days, when he's learned how to carry corn."

"Nay, I'll say naught," replied Roger; "but I'm glad you've told me. It lets a bit o' daylight in on a lot o' things. It was just like father, that was, to see his chance and buy it, and get his master between his tweezers. But it was a rotten, low trick to play on my mother—a rotten, low trick it was! And it explains Sam. I could never see Laycock in him, but I can see Wainwright. James's uncle! The Pharisee and the Publican! that beats the band, that does!"

The smile crept back to Betty's lips but it was feeble and uncomfortable, and when Roger glanced at her he saw tears standing in her eyes and he became contrite at once.

"Now, I've gone and done it!" he said. "Clumsy as usual! That's my bit of Metcalfe, you see. But cheer up, Betty! We'll have no rain when the glass is at set fair. That trouble o' yours is an old one that everybody's forgotten, and we'll let it lie."

"I haven't forgotten," she said gently. "I can never forget. Sometimes even yet I feel bitter when I look at Sam and know there's no wedding-ring on my finger, and that the man who did me the wrong went respected to his grave, clearing his conscience with money he never missed. I paid with shame, and I must go on paying and so must Sam."

"Aye, but you know," said Roger as he rose to his feet and emptied Betty's cup into the sink; "things 'll look a sight better when you've drunk a cup of hot tea, and that's what you're going to do before you speak another word. Now you'll just do as you're told—a good drink first, and then a bit of this buttered toast!"

He stood by her side and filled the cup, and she smiled up into his face and did his bidding.

"You've masterful ways, Roger," she said. "You're like your father in a lot o' things, but you've a deal of your mother in you too. She was a good soul, was your mother. Never an unkind word to me passed her lips and she said to me one day—'Betty, lass, you mun remember what the Lord said to that other poor soul that slipped—'Neither do I condemn thee!' And I daren't tell her she hadn't been wronged—not in the way she thought, though your father did wrong her shamefully, as you say. And she used to say to me 'You know, you've your little lad to be a comfort to you, and you must bring him up to be a good 'un, and let him see naught in his mother to be ashamed of!'"

"And that you have done," said Roger. "But you're eating naught and there's no sense in that. Now you just set your loom going while I do a bit o' yarn spinning."

She smiled then and raised the cup to her lips. Roger was eating heartily and seemed in no hurry to set his spinning-frame in motion. At length he began:—

"I'm middling well off now, you know, Betty, and I'm going to see if I can't fix that lift for Sam. He's got it into his head that there's a sight o' money to be made out o' butterscotch if he'd only capital to start a business, and I believe him. There's money in it as sure as there's a harvest in a bag o' seed, and he shall have a thousand pounds to set him going, anyway."

Betty's cup would have dropped if Roger had not caught it.

"A thousand pounds! Nay, Roger, whatever are

you saying, and whatever would he do with all that money? A thousand! I never heard tell of such a thing. You'll be hurting yourself, love."

"Not I!" replied Roger airily. "I shall never miss it. Between you and me father's left somewhere about a hundred and sixty thousand to be divided among us, so you've no need to worry about an odd thousand, only you and Sam must keep it to yourselves, of course. And there's another thing. You and me will have to keep our eyes on Sam. He's large ideas, Sam has, same as a Wainwright, and he'll have to be guided and checked. He's a good chap, but you hit the nail on the head a bit since—he can't carry corn."

Betty nodded. There was a little pucker of uncertainty on her brow, but the figures of Sam Laycock's fortune were beyond her comprehension, so she said nothing.

"When Sam gets hold of a thousand," continued Roger, "he'll toff himself up like our George and do the large like a drum-major walking in front o' the band. But that sort o' thing isn't going to sell butterscotch by the ton——"

"Nay, Roger, how you run on!" interrupted Betty. "Butterscotch by the ton! Whoever heard tell o' such a thing?"

"By the ton and train load," continued Roger. "*You'll* see it's made right and between us we'll keep Sam's bit in his mouth and see he doesn't go too fast. It's a blooming nuisance, but I've been having my studying-cap on this last day or two, and I can see there's no help for it but what I shall have to stick to business. We'll make a company—you and him and me; and before long you'll be having your dinner at seven o'clock and wearing a silk dress to match Sam's evening togs. You take my word for it!"

Betty had recovered her breath and her smile.

"I'm going to wash up," she said, "before you send me clean daft with your fairy tales. Train loads of butterscotch and silk dresses—who ever heard such blether? Coming into all that money has turned your

head, Roger. It's a good job I know what you are or you'd be turning mine."

"Give us hold of a cloth and I'll wipe 'em for you," said Roger as Betty poured the hot water into the bowl; "and just try to get it into your head that aught I touch has got to go. That's Laycock! Money's naught to me, mind you—that's Metcalfe! But wherever I go fishing *I catch!* And I tell you it's going to be butterscotch in tons and train loads, and somebody else may dole it out in ha'porths. Only there won't be any ha'porths, you understand. 'Binns' Beatific Butterscotch,' when it gets dressed up in silver and gold'll be sixpence a quarter."

"Sixpence fiddlesticks!" laughed Betty. It was plain from the look on her face that she was convinced these cheerful, confident exaggerations were not meant to be taken seriously. "If I didn't know it was your nonsense I should be falling out with you, Roger, for making game of me and classing me and Sam with the Forty Thieves. There's plenty o' profit at twopence a quarter!"

Roger laughed. "Send Sam up to Moor House when he's had his supper to-morrow," he said. "You can tell him what I've been saying if you like; but he's no need to change into his Sunday clothes. It isn't as if Jim's grandmother 'ud be there!"

Again he laughed, and all the more loudly because he saw Betty's brow contract; but he took her face between his hands and kissed it.

"You'll look no bonnier," he said, "when you get inside that silk dress I was telling you of. You couldn't!"

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH ROGER UNFOLDS FURTHER PLANS

FROM Carr Bottom to Lonedale the road is so devious that four miles must be covered before the traveller even catches sight of the place, but by one who knows the short cuts and by-paths, and pays little heed to steep hills and less to notice boards the journey may be considerably abbreviated.

Lonedale is different from all the other dales that open out into the valley of the Aire in that it does not open out at all. The other dales are wrinkles on the face of Nature, but Lonedale is a deep dimple. From any eminence across the valley you may look beyond the river and you will see the wrinkles, separated from each other by long ridges of green pasture or brown moor, sometimes by great warts and carbuncles of hills, and if the day be clear you will discern signs of human activity among the wrinkles—dabs of grey where a village has been built, with one or more factory chimneys upreared against the green background. But you will not see Lonedale. You will not even know that the dimple exists.

It is a pretty sight, after climbing hundreds of feet from the railway and crossing a stretch of table-land which is the recreation-ground of boisterous winds, to look down upon the old weather-beaten houses that lie in the hollow ever so far below, like tea-leaves at the bottom of a green cup. A good road winds steeply down,

threads its way along the valley, climbs steeply out again on the far side. You never saw a manufacturing village so cosily tucked away in its cradle of hills.

The mill is beside the beck whose waters turn its great wheel to this day. The chimney rises above a cluster of trees, a green carbuncle of hill rises above the chimney, the moors rise above the carbuncle, and beyond there is the great plain of the sky—that and nothing else. It is a pretty sight, I say, but there is a touch of wildness in the prettiness, for Nature there has not been wholly tamed and cultivation is still at grips with the wilderness.

The small, square-towered church stands by the roadside a little above the village, with the plain, homely-looking vicarage adjoining. Here, some thirty minutes after he had parted with Betty, Roger stopped and greeted the Vicar who was mowing his lawn and perspiring profusely.

"I thought parsons hadn't to work for their livings but had 'em given to them," he began.

"Go on thinking," said the Vicar. "There's hope for any fool who'll think. Some never do think, and some drop thinking because it's too much fag, and some merely think they think."

The Rev. Bernard Payne had a face that was tanned to a deep brown by exposure to the open air, and his hands were rough as if no strangers to manual labour. His trousers gave similar evidence and even his shirt, which was carefully patched where he had worn it out at the cuffs and elbows. One could obtain no testimony from the coat and waistcoat which had been tossed on to the garden seat when they became encumbrances.

Roger received the retort good-humouredly.

"One for you, Mr. Payne. I'll beat you with a gun or a line, but when it comes to tongue-slinging I give in. You may be short o' muscle but you've no lack o' brains."

"Brains!" ejaculated the Vicar in a tone of mocking irritation. "What use have brains ever been to me? Who in this forsaken hole cares a bone-button about brains? It's brass they care about, not brains. You can marry folk and baptise 'em and bury 'em without

needing brains. You can send 'em to sleep in their pews without brains. You don't need brains to listen to their scandal when they're going through their neighbours' characters with a small comb. Get out o' my way. Can't you see you're standing on long grass?"

"Give it a rest," said Roger, laughing, "and fill your pipe out o' this. What's been ruffling your hair this time?"

Mr. Payne took the profferred pouch and went over to his coat in search of a pipe.

"Frank!" he replied curtly. "That lad'll be the death of me. Here he is at twenty-five costing me no end of money every year and never earning as much as pays his board. Always some fool notion in his noddle that's *going* to do the trick, but never does it. I'm sick and tired of it, and I've told him so. So has his mother."

"Brains again," laughed Roger. "That's what comes of being the son of brainy parents. Tell him to go on thinking. There's hope for any fool——'"

"One to you, Roger!" interrupted the Vicar who was putting on his coat as a precautionary measure against a chill. His eyes were laughing now and it was easy to see that his irritation was largely make-believe. "Come and sit down a minute. Frank's gone for a walk: hopes to catch a glimpse of your sister Florence somewhere about. 'Why on earth, you young fool,' I say to him, 'don't you cast your sheep's eyes on the Princess Royal? You'd have just as much chance—an impecunious young beggar who can't even live by his wits but has to live on his father! Do you think any self-respecting lass is going to look at such a shiftless lame duck as you?'"

Roger let him run on until his breath gave out and then said:

"Never mind his courting; that's between him and Floss, and she'll know how to deal with him when the time comes. What I'm wanting to get at is whether or no there's aught in this invention of his. He seems to

think we're going to run carriages and drays without horses after a bit, and I've a notion he's right."

"Right!" snapped the Vicar, "of course he's right. The lad's a genius! He's a miracle-worker! He's a born engineer! Tell him you want a railway to the moon and he'll work it out for you: you'll get there, right enough—on paper."

"Yes, I know," persisted Roger; "but about these horseless carriages. They've been having races with 'em both in France and here—there was a column in the paper about 'em last week. They're horses I'm inclined to put a bit o' money on. This contraption of Frank's'll run, won't it?"

"Run!" said the Vicar. "He'll break his neck with it, and mine, too, if I'd let him! It tears up this hill, barring odd times when it turns sulky, snorting and panting like a mad beast with a pain in its tummy; and every bairn scampers to its mammie skirling as if hell was let loose. Run! Don't take my word for it; ask your uncle Steve; ask anybody. Now my pipe's gone out. Where are your matches?"

"What's he going to do about it?" inquired Roger.

"I'll tell you what he'll do—just what he's always done before. He'll take it to somebody who'll look at it as if it was a mangy dog, and tell him they're sorry but the place is full of mangy dogs, and that a five pound note for the blooming thing'll be an act of charity—you know the dodge! But what can the poor beggar do? He's no brass, and his father hasn't; and he's no head for business if he had any. I give him up. He'll be to keep all his days, either by me, or some unlucky woman who'll go out charing while he stops at home and invents a charing machine."

Roger puffed away at his pipe, unmoved by all this invective, and held out the matchbox again at its close.

"I promised Frank I'd see what I could do if ever I came into any brass," he said, "and now that father's dead I feel like giving the lad a leg-up. I don't know much about engineering and that sort o' thing, but I know a chap who does—a practical man—and if we

could get him to go in with us I shouldn't mind putting an odd thousand into the concern. Of course, I should keep my eye on it myself and expect to make a bit out of it——"

The Vicar dropped his pipe and took out his handkerchief with which he mopped the perspiration from his brow. His voice was a little husky when he spoke.

"I'll tell you what it is, Roger, ' he said, "I've been at my wits' end with the lad—as clever a lad in his way as you'll find in all Yorkshire, and one who's never given his mother or me a minute's worry apart from this question of making a living. But this idea of yours has got to be thought about. Mind you, I'm grateful—' it was well that it was in your heart,' and I could say ' God bless you '—but suppose the business goes wrong and you lose your money. Of course, I know your father was very well off, and even when his estate is divided up you'll all have heaps; but I shouldn't like Frank to lose it for you."

"I'll watch that!" replied Roger. "Shooting and fishing's more in my line than making brass, but if I set out to make it I'll make it. Not but what it'll be mostly Frank's business, you understand, and if it's a success he'll stand to gain most by it, but aught I put my brass into I'll keep an eye on."

"You take my breath, Roger," said the Vicar, more huskily than ever; "but, you know, my lad, I mean no offence when I say you haven't been reckoned much of a business man, and I don't want to see you and Frank pour your brass down the sump. But come inside and talk it over with his mother——"

"No fear!" said Roger, hurriedly. "I know what women are, and I don't want my collar wetting. Don't you bother your head about whether I'm a business man or no. I've more business in my little finger than Jim has in his whole body. You just tell Frank I'll look round to-morrow morning and have a ride in his old box o' stomach-aches. I've got to see Uncle Steve yet."

"Aye, and somebody else, I warrant," said Mr.

Payne to himself, as he hurried indoors to impart the good news to his wife.

It was a short walk of only a few hundred yards to the row of superior cottages where Stephen Metcalfe and his wife Jane lived. Each cottage was fronted by a strip of garden and each tenant did his best to outshine his neighbour in the variety and attractiveness of his bloom. Across the way was the school, and beyond the school, in the deeper hollow, the cottages that huddled about the mill, and the mill itself.

Stephen was standing in the doorway, contemplating with satisfaction the irises and columbines which adorned his middle bed and lazily enjoying the cool evening breeze. He was a tall, rather gaunt man of fifty-seven, loosely-built, and with whimsical eyes that saw more than they affected to see. There was a shrewd look in them that was not a deception, and with the shrewdness there was a good deal of dry humour. Slow to anger and of large charity he was yet a man who could rule with a firm hand, and was known as a " tough 'un " among his subordinates at the mill.

" There's Roger coming, Mother," he called over his shoulder to his wife. Their two children were married and far away; but Jane was still " mother," though he was always " Steve."

" I thowt he'd turn up afore long," was the reply. The greeting between the two men was short and characteristic.

" Now, Uncle ! "

" Now, Roger ! "

Without other word or handshake they went indoors. Roger's aunt—a little, somewhat stout woman with fair hair that was beginning to turn grey, and cheeks that had not lost their apple redness—looked up from the window-seat and said " Well ! " as if the visit were a surprise. Roger went across and kissed her.

" You've got him put away, then," she said, as the men sat down. " You'd a fine day for t' funeral, anyway."

Her speech was much broader than that, a rich full-

flavoured Doric that would be unintelligible to those who are familiar only with our degenerate English, and which on that account must needs be modified.

"Yes," said Roger. "We were lucky. I thought you'd maybe have come, uncle."

"I did turn it over in my mind," said Stephen, "but I came to t' conclusion I should be just as welcome at home, so I kept out o' your gate. It wasn't you I was flayed on."

There was a quaint note in his voice which it is not easy to convey in words; a suggestion of humour. He seemed to be always on the point of laughing yet he never laughed; and though he spoke quietly and with deliberation he did not drawl.

Roger laughed. "There aren't so many who are flayed o' me," he said. "It's me who ought to be flayed o' facing you for I've naught good to tell you. He's left all mother's folk out in the cold; but then for that matter he's left everybody there but his children. They get every brass farthing. Even his oldest servants don't get a penny."

"Well," said Stephen, "he's left me just as much as I'd reckoned on, so I've no 'casion to grumble. I daresay your aunt's disappointed."

It was said slyly, and it provoked an immediate repudiation.

'Is she? His aunt's as much brass as she wants or is likely to want, for aught I know. There's many a man dies worth his thousands 'at hasn't t' price of his passage-money on him when he's to cross Jordan. He'll ha' left middling, I reckon?"

"About a hundred and sixty thousand," said Roger.

"Hear ye!" It was an incalculable sum to Jane Metcalfe, but there was none of the awe in her voice that would have appeared in many people's. "And that leaves you how much apiece?"

"Forty thousand," explained her husband.

"Then you can all be idlebacks," said Jane, "and set to work to lower t' pile. That's generally t' way. 'Clogs to clogs i' three generations,' as t' saying is."

Roger was looking at her with tolerant twinkling eyes. "You'd be best pleased, then, if he'd left me naught but his blessing?"

She looked up sharply. "If he hasn't left you t' same as t' rest he's been a wicked old sinner," she said.

"He's left me five thousand!"

"Then I hope he'll suffer for 't," his aunt replied hotly. "I don't know how he could fashion, and him just going to face his Maker. If it doesn't put him among t' goats it ought to."

"Nay, nay, Mother!" remonstrated her husband humorously, "that's sending him into t' fire right."

"And it's sending him where he ought to go," she replied, "to have t' dross burnt out of his soul."

"Now just you listen to me," said Roger, who was enjoying his aunt's outburst. "You reckon to believe in Providence, don't you? Well, then, I'm going to tell you 'at father did me a rare good turn where he maybe meant a mean 'un. It couldn't ha' been better; and that being so I bear him no grudge and there's going to be no bad blood between me and the others. They're welcome to every penny."

"Well," said his uncle; "you'll none starve on t' interest o' five thousand, and you'll get a good wage, I reckon, out o' t' business——"

"I'm not in the business," Roger interrupted. "The business goes to Jim and George. I've got the kick out."

His uncle's face sobered and the red in his aunt's cheeks assumed a deeper hue.

"Nay, but I call that a low trick," said Stephen.

"Aye, and them with all their mother's money an' all," broke in his wife; "I don't know how they can fashion to take it. It's robbery!"

"Father got most of their mother's money," Roger explained. "You see she hadn't made a will. I couldn't expect to share in that, of course; but, anyway, I'm satisfied. It couldn't have been better."

"Aye, but now look here, Roger," said his uncle soberly. "You've spent a deal o' time on t' moors, and

got a deal o' pleasure out on 't, but you know a man oughtn't to live just for sport——"

"Look *you* here," interrupted his nephew. "Don't most men live for sport? Didn't father live for sport? Making brass was his idea o' sport, but he didn't know how to play the game. He carried the mill on his back, and how can you play a game with a weight o' that sort? When he got to bed he shifted it on to his chest, as I was telling Jim. He turned the game into a toil of a pleasure; but it was his idea o' sport all the same.

"Now, I care naught about brass but I've been thinking things over and I'm going to make it and it's going to be sport. I've thought it all out and I can see there's a good deal o' pleasure to be got out of it. It's going to be a race between Jim and George and me. I'm handicapped. They're a going concern and sixty thousand apiece. I've no concern at all, and five thousand. Now then! death fires t' pistol and we're off! By gen, I'll beat 'em! I'll lick 'em into fits!"

His eyes sparkled, but his voice betrayed no great excitement—merely a subdued exhilaration of spirit in anticipation of the struggle and its results. It was difficult to read the thoughts of his uncle and aunt from their faces, which were so far merely inquiring.

"You'll have to mend your ways——" Stephen began, but again Roger interrupted him.

"Say *change*—I don't know 'at I shall *mend* 'em. I never shirked my job down at the mill. I've always turned my grindstone if I didn't put my nose to it. There'll have to be a bit less rod and a bit less gun, happen, but I'm going to live, mind you. Work is right enough, but it isn't the whole o' life; and making brass is going to be a game, and I'm not going to carry all I make on me till it becomes my master, as father did. No fear! The game's part o' life, but it isn't all o' life."

"Don't you set out to make a lot o' brass, lad," said his aunt earnestly. "Very oft it's like as it eats into men's souls same as a cancer eats into their bodies, an' they get no pleasure out o' their lives. You just find

a bit o' honest work 'at'll keep you out o' mischief; an' make it up wi' Mary so as you can get wed and settle down; but don't bother your head about beating your brothers. You know what t' Book says 'at it isn't going to profit a man to gain all t' world and lose his soul."

"That's right, Mother," said Stephen approvingly. "Give him a bit out o' t' Book."

"I'm taking a bit out o' t' Book," said Roger, with his thoughts on the picture he had not mentioned, "and you've no need to bother your head, Aunt Jane. When you see brass getting me into its clutches instead o' me getting it into mine you must shout. But you can trust me. I've got it mapped out and it's a new game I'm going to play. Why, I've as good as started two businesses already and Uncle Steve's going to help me to start a third."

"Aye?" His uncle's voice was doubtful. "I'm flayed your pace is ower fast for me. You want to creep afore you start to run."

"There's going to be no creeping," laughed Roger. "You can't creep when you're handicapped in a race."

"Happen not," objected Stephen, "but my running days are owered wi', except 'at I'm running down. I'm close on sixty, you must bear i' mind."

"Sixty's naught," replied his nephew. "I'm going to wind you up again and make you feel thirty. Now come; we'll get to business straight away. Is it true that Joe Holmes is going to shift into the town, and that the mill is to let?"

"It's true 'at he says so. He thinks it's out o' t' way here and 'at he's going to be handicapped, as you put it."

"He'll always be handicapped, will Joseph. It's *heart* he's short off—Mr. Timorous, father always called him. Well, let him go! Just you see him in the morning and tell him you and me'll take the mill and machinery over at a fair rent."

"A fair rent'll be a low 'un, I reckon?" suggested Stephen dryly.

"Nay, we'll play the game straight," replied his

nephew. "If we can't play straight we won't play at all. We'll give him what it's fairly worth—more, rather than less, for the sake o' the hands; and you and me'll work in partnership. That's part o' the game: Laycock-Metcalfe versus Laycock-Wainwright. Are you in?"

"Now, Steve!" said his wife with a warning look.

"We'll talk about it, anyway, but I'll be no partner," said Stephen. "It 'ud worry me to death, lad. A week's wage for a week's work'll suit me nicely."

"Well, you shall hear what I've got to say," said Roger.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH A MORE ROMANTIC PARTNERSHIP IS ARRANGED

LIKE some well-connected woman who has lost her youth but not her comeliness, and who will not allow her small world to overlook her ancestry, Lonedale is a little vain and a little boastful. Some Airedale villages are drab and disagreeable reproductions in miniature of the manufacturing towns. Their features are unpleasant. They were built by men who had no eye for beauty or for anything except the practical. Rows of unprepossessing workmen's dwellings, indistinguishable from each other in their ugliness, form perpetual eyesores. Life in these mean streets is aggressively public and unreasonably communal. Men and women sit on the doorsteps of their homes with their feet on the paved footpath and tell their neighbours across the way what they think of them and of the world generally. They are always sure of an audience—and a chorus. Here and there a better-class residence rubs shoulders with its humbler neighbours and partakes of their drabness. They are villages built for "hands" rather than for souls.

Lonedale is of another order and knows it. It has one drab spot where a number of cottages huddle about the mill, but that is only an insignificant patch on an attractive garment; and a sensible man will keep his eyes closed as he passes that corner and devote his attention to the high road (if such a low road can bear so lofty a designation) that threads its way along the bottom of the valley alongside the turbulent beck.

Lonedale, I say, is rather vain. It has good features, smiling features. The houses line the road, it is true, but with no depressing symmetry of inelegance. Some have their gardens, some their strips of green. Some look at the hillside pastures on the south ; others cross the road and look at the hillside pastures on the north ; but they are too polite to stare rudely into each other's faces. So the village straggles pleasantly along the road, with ample space between this group of buildings and that, the church standing sentry at the east and the chapel at the west—a mile apart.

The mill-owner's house, a prominent yet not too prominent building in the pleasantest part of the village, was a radiating centre of cheerfulness. Joe Holmes was not himself a cheerful individual, but during eight months of the year his garden was a joy and delight to the wayfarer, and visitors invariably stopped to admire the bloom. It was a very small garden, bisected by a flagged footpath that led to the front door, and the house itself was a modest, two-storeyed dwelling with nothing pretentious about it. It owed something, no doubt, to its background of fine, dark sycamores, but it was in debt chiefly to its two flower-plots and ribbon-like borders. The colour and fragrance of that small garden cannot be described on paper and I shall say no more about it.

On one side of this unpretentious Arcadia there stood the " Spotted Ox," well back from the road ; and on the other a few low cottages of irregular size—the smallest and most picturesque houses in the village. The windows and doors of these humble dwellings were painted white and kept in spotless condition. Virginia creeper spread its changing glory over the walls and invaded the roofs. A stretch of grass, vivid in colour because it was well cared for, lay like a narrow green rug before the doors. Adjoining the cottages the lowly meeting house of the Friends might be seen within its enclosure of grey walls, with a weeping willow to keep in memory the fateful persecutions which the Quakers of Lonedale had to endure in by-gone days. The

story has helped to make history : it is printed in books for all men to read ; and that is why Lonedale is boastful as well as vain.

We need pursue our way no farther at present, for not only was this the most delightful spot in the village, but the smallest of those attractive cottages—a mere white bandbox of a home—provided the casket for the treasure which Roger Laycock coveted and it is time we made Mary Standfast's acquaintance.

Mary was poor in purse and too delicate to work for its replenishment ; but her very small income sufficed for her very small needs. Her parents had been Friends and Mary still attended the occasional meetings, though she was one of the Vicar's most devoted helpers. Her eyes were gentle, but by no means weak, her features were beautiful, her skin was delicately tinted, her hands and wrists were exquisitely shaped ; and there was a grace in her movements that aroused other women's envy. Those who knew her well loved her, because she took so much sunshine wherever she went. She was never too tired to run to a neighbour's help ; never too busy to lend a sympathetic ear to a tale of woe ; indomitably cheerful, and the inspirer of cheerfulness in others.

She was sitting at the window, her head bent over the fine linen on which her skilful fingers were employed, and for ten minutes or more she had neither spoken nor raised her eyes, a fact which had not escaped the observation of Mercy Mee who was rocking herself on the hearth and reading the weekly paper with some impatience.

"It isn't Meeting night," remarked Mercy at length in a voice that had a snap in it, "but I suppose the cat can't both purr and mew at the same time."

"And have *I* been purring ?" inquired Mary, with no slackening of fingers.

"You've been mewing, I warrant, if only we could have heard you. Your thoughts have been at full length o' the chain."

"Thought cannot be chained, Mercy," returned her

companion with a smile. "It is winged. It can fly to the uttermost parts of the earth; it can even enter heaven——"

"We know all that!" interrupted Mercy; and it needed no quick ear to detect impatience in her tone; "but wings aren't much use when you put your bird in a cage, and your thoughts haven't strayed the width o' the road from Roger Laycock. Not but what they may have entered some sort of a heaven—I say naught about that."

Mary allowed her work to fall to her lap. "What is it you're wanting to say, Mercy?" she asked.

"It would make a goat sick," was the reply, "to read what they've put in the paper about Sam Laycock. You'll have seen it, I reckon, and closed your teeth on it. But there's no Quaker in me, and it turns my stomach. *Our* Vicar isn't all a parson should be, and I doubt sometimes if he has the root o' the matter in him, but Mr. Payne 'ud have choked if he'd tried to say one half the treacly stuff yon parson said. But you put finery on your dead to please your living, and he'll be baiting his hook for what he can catch from Mr. James."

Mary smiled. She did not speak for a moment, but just looked at the older woman with humorous reproach in her eyes. Each knew the other well. Mercy called herself Mary's servant, though she received no wages and shared the expenses of the home to some small extent. She watched over her mistress with the utmost devotion, and made light of sacrifice in the joy of service. Little wonder that Mary always spoke of her as "my friend."

"It is not for us to judge the dead, Mercy," she said.

"I'm judging the living!" retorted Mercy; "yon soapy parson. Luke would have put it in a nutshell: 'the rich man also died and was buried.' That would have been quite enough about Sam Laycock. Old Solomon knew that sort o' man—'There is that maketh himself rich yet hath nothing; there is that maketh himself poor yet hath great riches.' It was just like

Sam to think that five hundred pounds would pay his passage money into heaven. I only hope it *is* paid."

"If it isn't the Baptists at Carr Top will be terribly disappointed," said Mary.

"They'll be in Queer Street," replied Mercy, "they've got well on with the alterations on the strength of that promise; and it would be just like Sam to diddle them."

"Mr. Laycock is dead, Mercy. Let his name rest."

"Yes, we'll let him be," agreed Mercy, "but he died long before they buried him, did Sam. 'So are the ways of everyone that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof.' He knew all about it, did yon old king. But it wasn't Sam I wanted to talk about, but Sam's son. Are you going to get rid of your nonsense, now that there's no just and lawful impediment, and marry Roger? That's what I'd like to know?"

Mary smiled.

"Are you growing discontented with our quiet life, Mercy?"

"It makes no matter what *I'm* growing," replied Mercy. "It's you that are growing—growing old. You'll be thirty-one next and Roger thirty-four and it's high time you were wed, while there's still a bit o' bloom on the tree. 'Houses and riches are the inheritance of fathers, but a prudent wife is from the Lord.' I think it's a shame the way you've kept him dangling. If I'd been in your place I'd have been married years since, Sam or no Sam."

"I wonder if you would?" Mary smiled again as she put the question. She was very fond of her friend and knew what a loyal heart she carried, and how near the surface her emotions lay in spite of her rough tongue.

"Wouldn't I just!" replied the other. "I'm old enough to be your mother if I'd married young, and I can tell you it goes against the grain yet every time they tell me to put 'spinster' alongside my name. I was never engaged myself but once, and that was in a dream, and I shan't forget how disappointed I was when I woke. I could ha' cried for the young man's

sake, let alone my own, for he'd been rarely set up when I said 'Yes,' and I couldn't help thinking he was real and would be fretting because I'd slipped him."

Mary laughed merrily. "Perhaps it was Fred Butterworth," she suggested. "They tell me you ought to have married him."

"Aye, he's another I'm sorry for," replied Mercy. "I never see him trailing alongside that poor, helpless bundle o' cheap trimmings he calls Polly—and a right name, too, for such a parrot!—but I think what a good wife he missed when he didn't drop his handkerchief in front o' me. But you can leave me on one side, same as Sam Laycock, and turn your eyes on yourself and that lad of his. And if that isn't his knock, somebody's copying it."

The door opened at that moment and Roger entered.

"Alone, as usual, you two?" he said by way of greeting.

"Yes," replied Mercy, as Mary only smiled; "two ones make two, but two and one make trouble, as the saying is, and I'm finding a bit o' work upstairs now that you're here to keep Mary from moping."

Roger laughed, and seizing her by the shoulders held her at arm's length.

"That isn't out o' Proverbs," he said. "Now I won't let you go till you tell me whose saying it is!"

"Solomon's," she replied readily. "It's one o' them that were crushed out when the book was full; so now you can take your hands off."

Mary left her work and the two drew their chairs up to the hearth. Light was failing in the low room but a warm amber glow lay upon the hillside and there were flames in the fire-grate—it was all the illumination they needed.

"She's a good sort," said Roger; "the dear departed!"

"Yes," said Mary with smiling eyes. "She was trying to persuade me to marry you when you came in."

"Then by Jove I'd better leave and let her continue," said Roger, but without making any movement in

favour of the suggestion, " for that's just what I'm after myself. There's naught to hinder that I can see, for I'm a poor man now, Mary—cut off with a shilling."

Mary let her hand rest on his. " Five thousand pounds would be riches to me, Roger. It would be boundless wealth."

" Then you know ? " he asked, surprised.

" Florence wrote to tell me. The dear child makes all sorts of ridiculous and impossible suggestions for which I love her. She loves us both, Roger."

" Aye, she's a good sort, is Floss, and she'll have to be watched or she'll scatter her brass like hen-corn. But she's no need to think she's got to pension me, and you must tell her so, Mary. Father left me more than he reckoned on—more than he could keep back either—he left me himself. Do you know, Mary, I've been thinking things over and I've made a plan or two. I'm as certain I can make brass as I am that I can catch trout ; and I'm going to make it."

He looked into her eyes expecting to find a protest there, but he saw them bent tenderly upon him and his heart leaped. " Is it to be ' Yes,' this time, Mary ? " he asked.

" I will marry you whenever you wish, Roger," she replied. " I have thought sometimes that I was too weak and poorly to marry. You are so strong and vigorous, so full of vitality, that it seemed hardly possible that I could be intended for your help-meet. But I have prayed about it, and I have come to see that I was wrong. I believe I *can* help you because I know you so well. I am very sure of you, Roger. If some men had said what you did just now I should have been afraid that in time they might love money more than God, or more than me, but I know you would never do that."

He tried to speak, but by the gentle pressure of her hand she stopped him.

" Wait a moment. I want you to know that I am glad—very glad—that you are not in business with your brothers and must make your own way. I shall love to

nelp you. I don't even ask what your schemes are before I say I will join you in them ; and I will tell you what our business motto shall be—'ours,' Roger—'to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.' Now, go ahead and make money."

Roger drew her to him and kissed her.

"I'm the happiest man in all England to-night," he said, "and I'll try my best to make you the happiest woman. It isn't brass that'll do it, but you shall have as much as you want for all that. As for being weak and poorly, why, bless you ! you're a plant that needs tying to a good prop and you'll never look back again. Not that I'm all you take me to be by a long chalk. There's no ring round my head to keep me from putting my hat on, I can tell you ; and if it's a saint you're thinking you're going to marry you'd best get rid o' the notion. Why, lass, I thought you knew I was just a blundering, lazy lout of a man ; too easy-going, happen, to be ill-natured, but chokefull of faults ——"

"Of course I knew," she interrupted, laughingly. "I keep your halo in my heart and try it on your head when you're not there. In reality you are neither blundering nor lazy, but you rather like to make people think you are both. Oh, yes, I know you through and through, Roger. Florence knows you well, but I know you better."

She said nothing more during the next few minutes, for if their courtship was of long standing they were still man and maid and knew how to make the time pass pleasantly without speech. When they found their voices again Roger had much to say and Mary forgot all about Mercy until a cough from the direction of the staircase—a peculiarly persistent and hard cough—brought her to a state of contrition.

"I might have stayed longer if there'd been a candle," Mercy explained as she lit the lamp, "but by the look of your faces I stayed long enough to let you come to your senses, for which thanks-be. He was a wise man who said, 'Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing

and obtaineth favour of the Lord,' and I hope you'll live a long time to prove it, Roger Laycock."

"Then you congratulate me, Mercy, do you?" Roger asked.

"I congratulate both of you, and I'm only sorry you've been so long on the road. You're a lucky man, and nobody knows it better than me. Mary's one in a million: 'the heart of her husband can safely trust in her, and she'll do you good and not evil all the days of her life.'"

"Aye, that she will!" said Roger, "and you'll stop and do the same for us both, won't you? We should be lost without Mercy, eh, Mary?"

"We'll see about that," Mercy replied. "We'll go a step at a time, and the first step is to put a bit o' supper on the table. We'll make a feast, Mary; for if you can't kill your fatted calf you can fry your sausage, and pork's tastier than veal. Nay, sit you still; I can manage."

"Mary," said Roger, as the sausage spluttered in the pan—they had retired to the window seat but they did not lower their voices, for was not Mercy their trusted friend?—"did Floss tell you about the pictures father left me?"

"The pictures? No."

"One is 'Industry and Idleness'—you know the thing Hogarth did? I owe dad no thanks for it, but it shall hang in our drawing-room. The other is 'The Rich Young Ruler'—an oil painting as big as that wall. I'd sooner lose my five thousand than that picture. It tells me something every time I look at it. Floss says I'm going mad over it. It has a look of Jim about the face, and it sends a cold shiver down my back, and yet I never used to give it a thought before father died. It was only when old Clutterton read out that it was to be mine that I began to study it. We'll have it in the dining-room at The Sycamores, right in front of our eyes. It'll touch the skirting board I fancy, but that can't be helped."

"You foolish fellow," said Mary. "You talk as if The Sycamores was ours."

"So it is, or as good as ours," Roger replied. "I arranged with Uncle Steve that he was to discuss the mill business with Joe Holmes to-morrow, but when I bumped into the chap at his own gate I couldn't keep my mouth shut. It'll be all right. Joe's dying to get rid. He had to close his eyes while we were talking for fear I saw how they sparkled. He thinks he's catching a mug, and lots more'll think like him. Let 'em think!"

He laughed confidently and Mary laughed too.

"Roger hopes to run the mill, Mercy," she explained. "It's to be 'Roger Laycock and Company,' and I'm to be the Company."

"Well," said Mercy, "I never right knew what a sleeping partner was till this minute; it shows he's a bit of gumption. Now come, draw up your chairs, and we'll drink the health o' the new company."

When the time came for Roger to leave Mary walked up the road with him a little way. There was noise in the lighted parlour of the "Spotted Ox," but the houses were mostly in darkness and the street was deserted.

"Is that really to be our home, Roger?" Mary asked, as they paused for a moment before The Sycamores. "It seems too good to be true. Will Florence come to share it? She shall be very welcome if she does."

"Nay, my lass," replied Roger. "Floss'll stay where she is till Frank makes a home for her, and there won't be long to wait once he has me behind him."

"How sure you are of yourself, Roger," she said. "Don't be over-sure."

He pressed her arm and laughed, and the laugh was itself a reassertion of his confidence. "You'll see!" he said.

They walked on until they reached some black shadows just beside the Vicarage. There they stopped awhile, lingering over their good-nights as lovers do. Then Mary turned and hurried home.

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH WE VISIT THE WAINWRIGHT MILLS

THERE was nothing imposing about the Wainwright mills except their size. Roger Wainwright built them before Ruskin was born, but if some earlier prophet had fulminated with equal vigour against the sin of unsightliness, it would have made no difference unless it had hardened the grim Yorkshireman's determination to waste no "brass" on outward show. Mill-owners of a later day, men of broader culture and larger vision, have here and there built factories that are palaces of industry, pleasing, almost beautiful, to the eye. They have laid out open spaces in front of their mills with green turf and flower-beds and fountains of water where the "hands" may feast their souls whilst they rest their bodies in the intervals of work. In these favoured places Art walks arm in arm with Industry in full sight of the villagers, and makes it her business to lighten labour and sweeten it.

No artist interfered with Roger Wainwright when he built his plain stone rectangles and pierced the walls with row upon row of unadorned, narrow windows. No health authorities hampered him when he erected his workmen's dwellings as close to his mills and to each other as the necessities of traffic permitted. "Open spaces?" One can imagine how sardonically the old man would have smiled. Land was "brass," and the more buildings one could crowd upon the acre the more

brass saved. And brass saved was brass earned, mind ye!

James Wainwright Laycock, now senior partner in the old firm, was of another generation and another mind. He was proud of his possessions, for the Wainwright mills had a reputation second to none in the woollen and worsted districts of the West Riding, but he was at heart envious of the palatial buildings which his competitors were erecting lower down the valley. With James, however, envy was merely egotism. He was not the least bit interested in art, but he was greatly interested in himself and coveted the glory art might bring him. It would be delightful to hear men say, "Magnificent pile of buildings that, eh? Belongs to James Laycock, you know—head of Wainwrights." He would willingly have spent ten thousand pounds to beautify the buildings for the satisfaction of his pride, but would have vetoed the expenditure of ten thousand pence on improvements that nobody outside the mill would ever see.

As it was impossible to make any alteration to the outside of the mills, James turned his attention to the interior; and as the offices were the only portion that was open more or less to the public he wasted neither thought nor money on anything else. The room that had been his father's now became his, and without any delay he proceeded to beautify it. Its bare, colour-washed walls, decorated or disfigured with almanacks and market-reports and a faded map of England, he panelled with oak. Its stained, mud-coloured linoleum was hidden beneath a richly-coloured Turkey carpet. Stained glass shut out the disagreeable vision of grey slates and chimney-pots. A new fireplace was fitted with a massive oak mantelpiece, to match the polished oak chairs and desk. The only pictures on the walls were two oil-paintings brought from the Hall—a small one of Roger Wainwright, and a larger one of Samuel Laycock.

"And a fine old bill you've run up, too," grumbled George who had been slitting open the envelopes in

company with his brother, and was now standing beside the desk with his eyes fixed on the items of the decorator's bill. It was not really the extravagance of the expenditure that annoyed him, for James was ordinarily no spendthrift, whereas George had always shown a reckless disregard of money. The trouble was that he had not been consulted—that he had been as completely ignored as it had been their joint custom to ignore Roger in the days of their father's rule.

"I see no sense," he continued, "in turning an office into a drawing-room. We shall be having antimacassars and beaded footstools next and a couple of marble statuettes—Psyche, and Child with Pet Lamb. I'd put another picture up if I were you, and let me select it. It'll be 'Little Miss Vanity!'"

James laid the disagreeable letter he was reading on the desk-table and turned to meet the even more disagreeable taunt of his brother.

"I have furnished my room to please myself and to impress our customers," he remarked coldly. "You're at liberty to do the same in your office—within reason."

"Within reason!" repeated George, with some heat. "I like that, I must say! James, Pope and potentate by his own crowning, can order what he likes and do what he likes, and little princeling George can pay for it, and put his hands together like a good boy when he wants a sevenpence-ha'penny paper on the walls, and ask His Mightiness if he can have it. You can go to the devil, Jim!"

James's face assumed an expression of extreme weariness, supported by a martyr's patience.

"Need we discuss this, George?" he asked in a tolerant tone. "I am quite familiar by this time with your criticism, and you needn't go on flogging the dead horse. If you object to this outlay——" he paused, and stretched out his hand for the bill, turning to the second sheet to inspect the total—"If you think the sum excessive, I'll pay it myself. Really I don't think we need waste any more time over an insignificant matter."

"Insignificant!" sneered George. "You'd better not let Joss Cooper hear you call it insignificant. I overheard him talking to some other fellows down in the weft room and he said, 'He'll spend hundreds of pounds on his blooming office and grudges us a pail of limewash to keep this place sweet.' 'Insignificant!' I wonder those two old chaps don't jump out of their frames!"

James's face had become sterner and colder at the mention of his workpeople's fault-finding, and there was a note of asperity in his voice as he said:

"The matter is closed, George. I shall discharge this bill myself, so please don't refer to it again. And I don't want to hear what Joss Cooper or anyone else says about me. Your business is to see they get on with their work and don't waste time in idle tittle-tattle, and if you'll allow me to say so it's business you've been neglecting lately."

Again George fired. He rapped out an oath and was beginning a hot protest when James stopped him.

"I'll have no swearing, George. No bad language ever passed the lips of those two men"—he glanced reverently at the framed pictures—"and to our father particularly it was most distasteful. You would never have dared to speak in his presence as you have spoken in mine, and I'm going to maintain the tradition. I neither swear nor permit swearing. With all his faults Roger has a clean mouth, and I'm sorry that the one member of the family who has begun to violate its code is my own brother."

The smug sentences, slowly and unctuously delivered, produced a reaction and George laughed.

"Old Pecksniff could hardly have done it better, Jim," he said; and had the satisfaction of seeing an angry flush colour the other's forehead. "Plato boiled down to the *Sunday Companion!* I don't wonder Rosie laughs at you. She says whenever you speak her hands go fumbling round for her Prayer Book and she wonders where you dropped your surplice."

"Rosie's stage humour will be appreciated, I daresay,

in certain circles," replied James, concealing his annoyance behind a mask of coldness; "but we won't bring her into the discussion—indeed the discussion is ended. This letter tells me we've lost that order of Simonsons' for five hundred twills. Where do you think it has gone?"

"Turner Brothers?"

"Roger has got it!"

George whistled. "Undercutting, I suppose, to get in."

"No," said James, "they're giving him the same price. We should have got it if we'd met them fairly, as they put it, over that last claim."

"Serves us jolly well right," said George; "it was our fault and we ought to have taken to it."

"Business is business," said James. "Every man plays for his own hand. If they'd stuck out a bit longer they, no doubt, would have got what they asked for."

"That's the second lot Roger's got from us," said George thoughtfully. "The idle young ruler isn't doing so badly."

James shrugged his shoulders. "Roger's competition doesn't concern me. He's given half his money away they tell me, and has begun manufacturing with a couple of thousand."

He smiled contemptuously, and George laughed. "What are we going to do—crush him?" he asked.

"We shall be saved the trouble," said James. "His paltry business will tumble about his head by and by, and leave him broken and bankrupt. Roger is incapable of steady, prolonged effort, or father would not have left him so ill-provided. These pin-pricks are annoying, but they don't go deep. A little patience and then ——"

At this moment a clerk knocked, and put his head in at the door. "A Mr. Johnson and Mr. Cliff to see you, sir. Private business connected with your father."

"Where are they, Ben?"

"In the corridor, sir."

"Keep them there ten minutes and then show them in."

The door closed and the eyes of the two brothers met.

"They'll have come about that subscription he promised the Baptists at Carr Top," said George, who knew that his brother was quite aware of this.

"My mind is a blank about any such promise," returned James. "Are you staying in, or do I speak for us both?"

"I'm a missing number," laughed his brother. "I guess you can say 'No' for me as nicely as I could do it myself."

James smiled, and George left the room.

A few minutes later the two gentlemen were ushered in and shaken cordially by the hand. Mr. Johnson was an elderly man with a grave face and stern eyes; rather tall and well-built. His companion, Mr. Cliff, was older still; short, round and cheery. It was he who began the conversation after the mill-master had bid them be seated.

"You'll perhaps guess our errand, Mr. James, and we mustn't keep you over long. Busy business men ourselves, sir, as you're aware, though only in a very small way; eh, Johnson?"

Mr. Johnson nodded approval, with the expression of a judge conceding an argument.

"You will, no doubt, know, sir," continued Mr. Cliff, "that your father—a sad blow his death must have been to you, sir, and his family—your late father, I should say, very generously promised us five hundred pounds to our renovation fund."

James bent a searching glance upon the speaker, and in a low firm voice that simulated genuine surprise, interrupted him.

"You say my father promised you that. Excuse me if I don't take your meaning very quickly, but this is news to me. To what renovation fund do you say my father undertook to contribute this large sum?"

"We're in a poor way at Carr Top Baptists," said

Mr. Cliff. "Very few of us left to keep the old place going, and it's got into that bad a state that tinkering at it's no good. It's a top to bottom and bottom to top business this time. You'll know, I daresay, that your father's first wife was a member with us, and your father a regular attender for a considerable number of years; and my friend Johnson and me, being of the old school, as you may say, were made into a deputation to wait on your father and put the case before him. Wasn't that so, Johnson?"

Again Mr. Johnson signified solemn approval.

"Yes?" said James.

"We had what you might call a rough passage the first part of the journey," Mr. Cliff continued cheerily. "Your father reaped up an old story that it wasn't likely he could have forgotten, and Johnson and me had it in the neck, I can tell you. But in the end he softened, and for your mother's—I should say for his first wife's—sake, he said by-gones were to be by-gones, and we should have five hundred. That took our breath——"

"As it takes mine," said James. "I never knew my father change his mind or act on impulse. It was entirely contrary to his nature as well as to his custom. Five hundred pounds, you say? I take it, then, he gave you a cheque for this extraordinary amount——?"

"Nay," said Mr. Cliff. "If he'd done that we shouldn't be here, Johnson and me. We were to have it when the work was done. He'd an eye to bank interest, had your father, Mr. James—as keen an eye as here and there one."

"But you have his promise in writing, no doubt?" persisted James. "My father was a man of method, and the last man in the world to neglect simple precautions. You, no doubt, have the document with you?"

"Your father's word was his bond, sir," said Mr. Johnson, with marked emphasis; and James inclined his head in approval of the assertion.

"I am glad to believe it was," he said reverently,

" but he left nothing to chance. Am I to understand you have no written evidence ? "

" It was reported in the *News*," remarked Mr. Cliff. " You'd be sure to see it there, sir. ' Local Manufacturer's Generosity,' it was headed. We've no other sort o' papers, eh, Johnson ? "

Mr. Johnson's eyes were fixed on the mill-master's, and he made no reply.

James spoke soothingly. His long fingers toyed with a pencil as he stretched his arms over the desk and proceeded to deliver judgment.

" You put me in a peculiarly painful position, gentlemen," he said. " You have come, I quite understand, to ask me to pay you five hundred pounds out of my father's estate, to liquidate a promise which you no doubt honestly believe he made you. But you have unfortunately no evidence, and my brother George and I are trustees under my father's will. I must be frank with you. We have no power to pay you that money. We are bound to discharge his just debts——"

" This is a debt to the Lord," interrupted Mr. Johnson in a stern voice.

" I am sure you are sincere in thinking so," said James in conciliatory tones, " but our limitations as trustees are strictly defined, and however great our sympathy and goodwill we may not regard this as a legal obligation. You are business men, and you follow me ? "

Mr. Cliff's round face lengthened considerably during this kindly pronouncement, but not a muscle of Mr. Johnson's relaxed and it was he who now spoke.

" There are higher obligations than those of man-made laws," he said severely. " There are obligations due to God, and there are others due to a father's memory and a father's honour. These are the obligations, sir, we would emphasise."

James's soft eyes never left the speaker's face and he replied with an intonation of sadness.

" You are quite right. These are indeed higher obligations, but of these the law of the land takes

no account and it is by that law we trustees are bound."

"You and your sister and brothers, sir, are the only beneficiaries under your father's will," returned Mr. Johnson, in the same uncompromising voice. "If you respect your father's memory you will honour each of you, his promised word."

"Ah," said James, musingly. "Now we are on different ground. If you abandon your claim and appeal to our generosity I can speak with freedom. In that case, you see, you are beginning *de novo*. You are now asking *me* to subscribe to your fund and to use my influence with my sister and brother to do the same. Is that so?"

"We must admit we have no legal claim," said Mr. Cliff doubtfully: "but knowing what sort of man your father was—one that never went back on his word—we thought——"

"I'm sorry to interrupt you, Cliff," said James with a distinct hardening tone, "but I must ask you to leave my father out of the question. I have no evidence that he ever promised you anything. Your hopes may have misled you, or his meaning may not have been clear—I do not know. It is open to anyone to come to me and say 'Your dead father promised this and that,' but his successor is no fool."

"Sir," said Mr. Johnson, half rising from his seat, "I protest——"

"Hear me out," said James, "and you will perhaps protest more. You would have me honour my father's memory? I will. It was your little Bethel, I believe, that turned him out of the church when an unproved charge of immorality was brought against him. It was the Baptists of Carr Top, his brethren who should have sympathised with him and held out the hand of fellowship, who drove him from their midst. From that day he never entered the place again and in the misfortunes that have befallen it you may see the hand of God. Whether or no in a moment of weakness—and he had such mental breakdowns before the end

came—he made any such promise as you suggest I cannot say, though I find it hard to believe ; but I assure you, gentlemen, in my sister's and brother's name, that we will honour our father's memory by refusing to help by so much as a penny those who treated him so unchristianly. That is my answer, gentlemen, and your protests will fall on deaf ears."

"Now, Mr. James——" began Mr. Cliff, but Mr. Johnson rose and stopped him with a gesture.

"We will not beg, Mr. Laycock," he said. "It is the Lord's work, not ours ; and He would not have us humiliate Him before man. It was for his wife's sake your father made this promise——"

"Then," said James, looking at his watch and pushing back his chair ; "you must look to that wife's son to honour this alleged draft. I don't speak for Mr. Roger—he is outside the circle of my responsibilities. All I say is that you need not look to us. The answer is final—not a penny, gentlemen ! You will excuse me now if I turn to business."

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH ROGER ADDRESSES HIS "HANDS"

THERE was no excitement in Lonedale when the news spread that there was to be a change of masters at the mill, and that Roger Laycock was to be Joe Holmes's successor. The weavers contemplated the change with satisfaction, for Roger was young and good-natured and even more approachable than Joe, who had never been distinguished for what was termed "standoffishness." Joe, however, was a weathercock of a man, one day as soft as a south wind and cheerful as an April morning, the next rough and biting as a gale from the north. For the last two years the threat of his intended departure from this "beastly hole" had been the stick which he had held over their heads whenever anything had gone wrong at the mill, but the impending disaster had been so often postponed that even the most fearful had ceased to be disturbed, and had greeted the declaration with a smile that was sometimes merely unbelieving, and on other occasions defiant.

The men were not so sure that the change was for the better. Joe was only a poor sort of master, they were willing to admit; a man of moods, with no enterprise about him—"no heart in his belly"—but on the whole he had managed to keep the looms going, and whether Roger would do the same was more than doubtful. Not that they knew much about Roger, but it was reported from Carr Side that Wainwrights

had dispensed with his services, a circumstance that in itself was ominous. It had become known, too, that his father had left him a mere pittance in token of his displeasure; and if these facts were not enough there was the evidence of their own eyes for make-weight—was he not more sportsman than business man? The best man on the countryside with rod or gun? Good qualities, no doubt, in a gentleman of means, but of little use in the running of a mill. And after all, so they argued with their wives, a fellow who would let his young brothers run away with their father's fortune and their father's business, and who was looking no higher than Mary Standfast for a wife—a good enough lass, no doubt, and a lady, but with a purse that was as near empty as any in the dale—was hardly the sort of man to make things hum: hardly the sort of man to inspire confidence.

Roger seemed to know all about it by intuition. His eyes twinkled when he went down into the weft-room in search of his uncle one morning when he had been in possession a little more than a fortnight.

"Get 'em all together, Uncle. We'll stop the engine half-an-hour sooner and I'll have a word with 'em. All the lot—men, women and half-timers."

It was a curious crowd that assembled to hear him half-an-hour before noon. Stephen stood by his side and steadied the trolley which was to serve as platform. Roger thrust his hands into his trousers pockets and smiled at the upturned curious faces.

"I wanted a word with you," he began. "I'm no hand at making speeches, but I know what I want to say and it won't be wrapped up so that you can't understand it. I've been watching you this last fortnight and you've been watching me. Some of you think you've got a country Joskin for boss who doesn't know t' difference between a beam and a bobbin. And some of you have an idea 'at I shall smile however many ends you drop and that the only notice I shall take'll be to ask you kindly to be a little bit more careful if it's no trouble, and please excuse

me mentioning it. Well, you're both wrong. What you've heard about me doesn't count—it's what I am now. And what you may have been in Mr. Holmes's time doesn't count—it's what you're going to be. There's nothing about manufacturing I don't know, and he'll be a smart man who'll diddle me—he'll be so smart that I'll give him a better job instead of sacking him, so now you can try.

"But I've been watching you as well, and with just two or three exceptions you're a good lot, and we're going to pull well together. Those two or three can either get hold and pull with us, or they can go—either way'll suit me. I say *us*, because in this concern those who work for me'll be working for themselves. I'm Sam Laycock's son, and I'm head o' this business—make no mistake o' that—and it'll happen be news to some of you that I'm going to make brass, hand over fist. Some of you doubt it? All right; time'll tell; and I'll give you t' chance to back a winner.

"'What do I mean?' I mean this—that what I make I'll share with all t' rest of you. I don't reckon much of charity, but I believe in giving folks a fair chance to earn what'll keep 'em in comfort and give 'em self-respect. So if I'm the head and you're the hands we're all one body, as it says in the Old Book; and somebody you all know and trust, and who's in this business with me and who's going to be my wife, please God, before long, will see to it 'at there's fairation when we share out. Now we're going to have a committee that'll look into things and suggest what's best to be done, and consider my suggestions. There'll be my wife and Stephen Metcalfe and me on it, and you can elect three of yourselves to serve with us. Mind you, I'm not promising to do all you want—I'm not such a born fool as that—because I've a deal o' confidence in my own brains and maybe not as much as I ought to have in other folks'; but I'll promise to do what I can to make you all as prosperous and contented as hard-working folk ought to be. I've thought out a scheme but I'll let the committee see it first, and then

we'll call you together again when we've shaped and polished it. Now let's hear what anyone has to say before we elect this committee."

"Is it all wind, think ye?" one of the older men asked as he walked up the street with some of his mates a while later. "There's summut about the chap, if ye ask me."

"Aye," said another; "it wasn't just what he said; it was t' way he said it. He's a bit of his old dad in him, has Roger."

"But a deal pleasanter," remarked a third. "Sam was bitters and Roger's ginger. I thowt he was milk but seemin'ly I was mista'en."

"Aye, there's fizz in him," said the first speaker. "We shall see whether it's nowt nobbut gas."

Roger talked it over with Mary on the eve of their wedding-day. They were standing side by side in front of the big oil-painting, which half-covered one wall of the dining-room at The Sycamores, as Roger had predicted. The furniture was shrouded in dust-sheets, but he had removed the cover which Mercy, careful housewife, had spread over the frame, and was looking on the picture with eyes that never lost their interest.

"I shall place you with your back to it when we are at meals," said Mary laughingly, "or you will never see me. If the rich young ruler were a woman I should be jealous."

He tightened the arm that was about her waist and kissed her.

"I'm a poor stick as a lover, Mary," he said. "Is it because I've loved you ever since you were a little lass, when you used to stand beside me as I fished, and pity the poor grubs that I put on my hooks, and call me cruel when I flung my trout on the grass to gasp their lives away? Eh, lass o' mine, if only my lips could say what my heart thinks of you!"

"They don't need to, Roger. I know; I have always known. We are very sedate lovers—Mercy cries shame on me when you are gone: tells me I am

cold as an empty grate and quotes the Song of Solomon. She does not know how hot the fire is, though there is no blaze ; how my heart is satisfied if it does not dance. I am very happy, Roger."

"Aye, lass? You shall be happy all your life if love can make you so—happy and contented!"

"That is what you told your workpeople."

"*Our* workpeople, Mary," he corrected.

She accepted the correction. "Yes, ours. It is a grand ideal, Roger—to capture the hearts of men and women by love."

"That's parson's work, Mary, my lass."

"Oh, no," she returned brightly. "That's where people make a mistake—it's ours—yours and mine —in the mill. To do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly—to let them all see how God would have us run a mill: our idea of how God Himself would run it; to do it with many mistakes, perhaps, but on the whole successfully—that is to capture men's hearts for Him as well as for ourselves. To show our faith by our works; by what many people would call our folly, our sacrifices—that is to find happiness, and to make it, too."

"It's a big programme, lass," said Roger; "over big, happen, for me. But I'm out for big things, and I'll trust you to keep me on the right road."

"Not me, Roger," she said softly—"Him!"

"Both of you, then," replied Roger. "I say, Mary, I wonder if *he* turned the thing over in his mind, and chucked his possessions overboard in the end."

His eyes rested again on the sorrowful face of the man in the picture, and Mary smiled.

"'What is that to thee?'" she quoted; "'Follow *thou* Me!'"

"Aye, that's it," he agreed. "There's always sound sense in what you say, Mary. I don't suppose I should have done it if I'd been in his place for all that."

"Yet you're not envious of your brothers' fortunes," she said. "You're not anxious to be rich, Roger."

"That's so," he said heartily; "but I'm going to make fortunes all the same. I feel it, Mary; it's a fire in my bones. I'm going to make brass, but you shall decide, my lass, what's to be done with it when I've made it. The cup's naught to me—it's the race I care for."

"I know," said Mary. "Mercy says I should warn you. She wants me to remind you that Solomon says that riches make themselves wings and fly away as an eagle toward heaven, and that it is the blessing of the Lord that maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it. But I trust you because I know you. You're a big, simple-hearted, honest boy, Roger. I believe you'll be a boy when I'm an old woman. Life will always be a game with you, and why not? Better a game, well and fairly played, than a battle. I'm going to be very proud of you, Roger."

"It's me that's going to be proud," he replied. "Jim's wife isn't to be named in the same breath with mine, spite of all her haughty airs and fine dresses. As for George's—I tell you what, Mary, I'm sorry for that poor lad. Rosie's leading him a dance already by what Floss says. He's married trouble, has George."

"I must try to get to know Rosie," said Mary. "She can't be *all* bad—nobody is; and in spite of his troubles, George seems very much in love with her."

They left the house and made their way to the cottage where Mercy had prepared a meal.

"Now come," she said as they entered; "there's lots to be done when you're gone, Roger, and I for one shan't be sorry how soon you give us a view o' your back. On a night like this Short's a good friend and Long outstays his welcome, as the saying is. Draw your chairs up and buckle to!"

"Nay," said Roger, "if you set a meal like this before a fellow you're tempting him to take his horse out o' the shafts, Mercy. You should just have slipped the nose-bag on if you'd wanted to see my back—given me a bit o' cheese and a biscuit."

"If I'd been setting a trap," retorted Mercy, "I

might have done ; but seeing I'd a man to feed and not a mouse I set man's food before him. Now, the Lord pity us, if there isn't someone else coming in ! "

Roger laughed. He and Mary had already exchanged significant glances, for their ears had detected the approach of Frank Payne's car which was only a little more silent than a road-engine ; but they were surprised when Florence entered.

" I've not come to stop," she explained. " I knew Roger would stay until midnight if he wasn't removed by force, so Frank said he would bring me over and run us both back. He's just gone up home for a spanner and will be here in a few minutes."

" And is Mary's bridegroom to trust himself to that canister o' squibs ? " inquired Roger with a wry face. " I'll be safer on my legs, Floss ; thanking you both for your kindness—your disinterested kindness."

" We've come all the way without a hitch," said Florence placidly. " Frank drives most carefully ——"

" Does he ? " interrupted Roger. " When he's dry goods like me on board he drives like the—— "

" Like Jehu, the son of Nimshi," said Mercy as Roger paused.

" That's the man I mean," said Roger, " but his name slipped me. Of course, when the luggage is marked ' fragile,' and has to be steadied with an arm round it, he'll be more cautious."

" Thank you, Mary," said Florence, deliberately ignoring this outburst. " I've had my last meal for to-day and Frank won't want to wait. If Roger has quite finished I'm sure you'll be glad for us to take him away."

" That's a true word, Miss Florence," said Mercy. " It'll be late to bed and early to rise at this house ; but men are all alike—as blind as bats when it pleases 'em not to see."

Roger rose. " I see there's going to be no end to Mercy's back-chat," he said, " so we'd best be going, Floss."

"And you'll maybe take these bits o' things with you, seeing your going to ride," said Mercy.

Roger glanced at the small heap of tradesmen's samples which lay on the dresser.

"I might just as well," he agreed; "if you've an old newspaper handy to wrap 'em up in."

Mercy opened a cupboard and laid a pile of neatly-folded papers on the dresser. "Help yourself," she said.

He unfolded one of them and gathered up his belongings; but as he set them down his eye caught a bold headline on the outspread sheet—"Local Manufacturer's Generosity."

He read it aloud and laughed.

"Do you remember Jim's face, Floss, when father told us what he'd done? We were at dinner," Roger explained to Mary, "and the old man was best side out. He had the *News* in his hand, and what they'd put in about his generosity was a sweeter morsel than the tart. He stroked himself all the evening over that bit o' soft sawder and had Jim on toast. Jim was mad about it; so was George, but George never let the old man know when he was mad, and Jim couldn't keep it in but had to get sarcastic. That rattled father, and he says 'For two pins I'll make it a thousand. Get me my cheque-book. Nobody went, because when he felt for his keys he hadn't got 'em—left 'em at the office, I suppose, and James sort of apologised. But it was a rare old storm whilst it lasted."

"And you never opened your lips," said Florence.

"Not I. It had naught to do with me if he'd given 'em five thousand instead of five hundred. *You* had plenty to say. You stuck up for the old man."

Florence flushed. "It was for your mother's sake he did it," she replied.

"Aye, but did he do it?" he inquired reflectively. "I must ask that old soberface that keeps the draper's shop below the mill—what's his name, Floss? an old fellow with whiskers who seems as if he spends his life

selling black gloves? He's one o' the pillars of Carr Top."

Mr. Johnson?" said Florence.

"That's the man. He was one o' the fellows that squeezed honey out o' the lemon, and I'd give a sov. to know how he did it. But did he get it?—that's what's bothering me."

"If he didn't——" began Florence; and hesitated, looking at Mary.

"If he didn't he will do," said Roger emphatically. "Jim and George won't shell out, that's dead certain, but the Carr Top folk needn't know it. Jolly good job I turned up that newspaper, for it had gone out of my head as clean as a whistle. You go down and see the old chap, Floss—if there had been time I'd have gone myself. If it hasn't been paid tell him he'll have a cheque when I get back. Keep him off Jim and George whatever you do."

"You'll pay it all yourself, no doubt?" said Florence.

"Why not? I'm the only one with any Metcalfe in me, aren't I. It isn't your debt, Floss."

"But it's a lot of money, Roger," protested Mary. "You can't afford it—not all at once."

Roger laughed. "Don't you worry, lass o' mine. It's part o' the game and I'll manage it right enough, you'll see. If Floss'll just see this old deacon——"

"Floss won't," said that young lady. "It isn't necessary, for I happen to know the sum is paid." She tried to speak unconcernedly, but Roger fixed searching eyes upon her, and the tell-tale colour flooded her face.

"Oh, so that's it, is it?" said Roger. "And where have *you* scraped up five hundred from to pay your father's debts? What have you pawned, my Lady Bountiful, to spare your brother's feelings and save his pocket?"

He seized her by the shoulders and held her at arm's length, trying to catch the eyes she averted.

"You'll hurt her, Roger," said Mary, gently. "You don't know what a strong grip you have."

For answer he drew his sister to him and kissed her. "You're a good lass, Floss," he said, "and I'll only rob you of half your pleasure; and that's a piece o' generosity on my part that I'll happen repent of. We'll divide that debt between us and cry quits. Now come; there's Frank blowing his blooming trumpet like the priests before Jericho, and if we don't get off Mercy'll be looking fouler than ever!"

CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH THERE IS A WEDDING AND A BIRTHDAY

IT was a very simple wedding, so simple, indeed, that the *News* compressed its account of the ceremony into seven lines. On the occasion of James's marriage, three years before, two full columns had been occupied by the list of guests and an enumeration of the costly presents. Roger's, however, was a poor affair, not worth the presence of a reporter. One cab brought all the invited guests from a distance—Betty Binns and her son Sam—and they sat with Uncle Steve and Aunt Jane in the front pew, supported by Mrs. Payne and her two daughters in the pew adjoining. Florence and Frank played their parts of bridesmaid and best man to the satisfaction of the workpeople who crowded the building, and who gave a hearty send-off to the newly-married pair when they departed in the "canister o' squibs," amidst a wasteful shower of rice, to Keepton station. There was no "breakfast," no "fussation" of any kind. The guests returned to their homes, and the clatter of the looms was heard again in the afternoon. It was altogether as ordinary and uneventful a business as the *News* was ever called upon to report, and even the seven lines were a concession—a tribute to the family rather than to the individual. A great disappointment, this elder brother of the proud Laycocks: this easy-going, feckless firstborn of the ambitious mill-master! That is what men said and thought; and James admitted it, even to his wife, for he had practised the

art of self-deception so long and assiduously that no modern Pharisee could have taught him anything.

"I shall not acknowledge the wedding in any shape or form," he said. "Father would have wished it so"; and Edie, mildly surprised, said nothing.

George's attitude was different.

"Of course we shall give him a present," he said to Rosie. "It's as little as we can do. He's as good as given Jim and me twenty thousand apiece with his clownish ways and want of push, and if that isn't a handsome, brotherly act, I'm no judge. We'll waste ten quid on him, anyway."

Rosie cared nothing about it. Until her baby was born she had refused to see anybody—more particularly her husband's relations, who were unlikely to be disposed very favourably towards her. Of James's attitude George had made her aware, and as there were no half-measures with Rosie, she was prepared cordially to dislike both him and his wife. She was less influenced by her husband's contempt of Roger and Mary because all he said convinced her that there would, at any rate, be no haughty condescension on their part, though there might be the equally distasteful compassion of the avowed saint for the impenitent sinner. That, however, she felt she could deal with.

Her baby was born on Roger's wedding day, and had no interest for her when she found it was a girl.

"Oh, good lord! Call it what you like," she said impatiently when George pressed her. "Call it Jezebel, if you wish."

Florence suggested Eleanor. It had been the name of Rosie's mother, and went well with the surname, and as George had no preferences, the matter ended there.

"I didn't want a girl," Rosie complained to Florence one day. "If I'd been a Chinawoman, I'd have chucked her into the river. Boys grow up and go their own way, and you've finished with them, but girls are a constant care. There's no end to the worry you have with them when they get into their teens; and that's

when you're getting old yourself, and could do with peace and quietness. And unless you've luck, they're on your hands for ever and ever."

Florence looked down compassionately at the unformed lump of humanity which was lying on her lap.

"If I believed half of what you're saying," she said calmly, "I should despise you."

"Get on with your despising, then," said Rosie unconcernedly. "You think I'm stuffing you because you've got the motherly instinct, or whatever they call it, and would slobber over anything in a long frock. I'm not built that way. Babies are a nuisance, and girl babies are worse than a nuisance—they're a disaster. That kid doesn't look much of a beauty at present, but nurse says they alter after a while; and I'm not one of your milk-and-watery women who are content to hear people praise their daughters. It would drive me mad to hear people talk about Mrs. George Laycock's pretty daughter; as if Mrs. George herself was a back number in lace caps; and yet if she happened to be plain I suppose I should be wild."

Florence was angry, and her eyes showed it when she looked into her sister-in-law's face, but Rosie only laughed. She knew that her power lay with men and not with women; that her own sex was not impressed by her pretty face and was usually repelled by the frankness of speech which commended her to the only class of men that had ever sought her company. With that class she was on excellent terms; one with them, willing to laugh at a venturesome joke or story, and well able to take care of herself when familiarities became too personal and pointed—"a girl with no nonsense about her," the fellows said, though nonsense was really the one property Rosie Mahony possessed in overflowing measure. Florence's indignant eyes were not blind to the prettiness, though you may be sure they did not exaggerate it; and if Florence's thoughts and judgment could have penetrated the girl's crust of vanity, they would have scorched her

soul. The crust, however, was pachydermatous and the unspoken protest afforded an amusing entertainment.

Hot words had risen to Florence's lips, but she choked them back. After all, what good purpose would be served by a quarrel? She could not help a little warmth creeping into her voice, however, as she said:

"Women like you oughtn't to have children. It's a greater misfortune to the child than to the parent; and the poor little thing didn't ask to be brought into the world. It's wicked to talk like that, and I won't believe you mean it."

Rosie laughed again. "I mean every word. That's one thing you can gamble on with me, Flo, that I say what I think. Most women don't—only their husbands and the Recording Angel know their real mind, and their husbands don't know it all—but I put all my thoughts on the bill. If George is willing, I'll make you a present of the kid."

"I wish I could have her," said Florence, coldly, "and save her from realising that she has a heartless mother. I'm glad she's a girl, seeing that James's children are both boys."

"Wait till you're in the same boat," said Rosie lightly, "and I bet you'll think as I do. You'll be as proud as Lucifer if your first's a boy; but you'll lie like a good Christian mother if it's a girl, and make people believe it's what you'd been praying for." She chuckled aloud at the sight of Florence's rising colour; but the next moment a frown settled on her brow, and a harder note came into her voice as she continued

"It'll be just like my beastly luck to have a girl every time. James has boys and Roger will have a boy—you see if he doesn't—and mine will be one girl after another."

"I sincerely hope there won't be any others," said Florence in her iciest tones.

"Same here," replied Rosie, "if they're all going to be girls."

Then silence fell between them; but it was impossible for the dark mood to remain with Florence long, when

baby looked vacantly into her eyes and tiny fingers almost clasped her own. The little mite was happy in its ignorance, content to lie on her lap and purr softly like a pleased pussy. Florence pushed the future from her thoughts and lived again in the present.

Rosie, propped up in bed, glanced with satisfaction at her dainty dressing-jacket and smoothed out its creases. Her eyes wandered round the room which George had furnished expensively, but not extravagantly. The costliness of it pleased her, though her taste would have been for something more ornate. The sober solidity of the mahogany wardrobe was altogether too stodgy. Mahogany was so depressing; satin-wood, something inlaid, something elaborately carved would have appealed to her more. Still, it was very grand, very impressive; George hadn't done so badly on the whole, though it was annoying to know that James's house was much larger and more elaborately furnished. That was something to be seen to and remedied after a while, and, at any rate, the place was better than Moor House, with its out-of-date, best-parlour-like chairs and cheffoniers and chests of drawers; infinitely better than the "cottage" Roger was taking his bride to. She called The Sycamores a cottage in her thoughts, though she well knew that her father and mother would have looked upon it as a small mansion, and she herself, in her youthful days, would never have dreamed of being mistress in such a house.

She turned to Florence, who was dreaming dreams as she crooned foolish murmurings into the uncomprehending ears of the baby, and in spite of herself her eyes softened.

"What sort of creatures are Roger and his wife?" she asked.

"They're dears, both of them," replied Florence, without looking away from baby's face.

"George says Roger's a fool and Mary a puritan," said Rosie. "They rather look it, in a way."

Florence's lip curled. "You've seen them, then?" she asked.

"George pointed them out to me. I wanted to see Lonedale, so we drove through one day, and he showed me the place where they are going to do the love-in-a-cottage turn. Quite romantic, isn't it, with its trim little garden and gaudy flowers?"

Florence made no reply.

"We passed the lovers on the moor, and I wanted George to pull up, but he wouldn't. They weren't very lover-like, I must say. I scarcely saw Roger, but I had a good look at his girl. Rather more than a girl, isn't she? And, my dear, *what* a frock! Home-made to the last hook and button. I nearly screamed!"

"Did you happen to see her face?" inquired Florence calmly.

"My dear, I saw all that was to be seen in the time. There's nothing the matter with my eyes, I assure you, if my heart isn't all it should be. She's the last word in demureness: the sort of face you see in the pictures the Catholic book-shops put in their windows. All it wants is a nice little oval gold frame round it."

"Yes," said Florence, with suspicious quietness, "she certainly has a beautiful face."

"Beautiful?" A ripple of laughter ran through the exclamation. "My dear Flo——"

"My dear Rosie," interrupted Florence, "neither of my other sisters-in-law is bad looking. Edie has fine features, and is very sweet and dignified, and you are as fascinating as the photographers have always made you—I wish I had half the attractions of either of you. But neither of you is beautiful, and Mary is. If your hairdresser were to take her in hand, and if Edie's dressmaker were given *carte-blanche* with her, she'd put you both in the back seats—you wouldn't have a look in."

She looked defiantly into Rosie's eyes, but saw nothing there except amusement.

"Then you like Mary very much?" said her sister-in-law. "What about her husband?"

"I've no doubt George has told you what I think of Roger," she said, and was annoyed with herself for sounding annoyed.

"Yes, but what George says doesn't matter. He dismisses him as an amiable fool who'll be a beggar in about ten minutes, and James is apparently of the same opinion. They call him The Idle Young Ruler. I suppose it's possible to be very fond of amiable fools."

"I don't know," said Florence, "they don't come my way. Roger isn't my own brother, and the others are, and one of them is your husband, but if you want my opinion, you're welcome to it: Roger is worth both of them put together."

"As much as that?" laughed Rosie. "Hadn't you better let me have the kid a bit? she'll tire you! What are Roger's excellences?"

The baby was asleep, and Florence ignored the suggestion.

"His excellences?" she repeated. What were his excellences? Quickly her mind pursued the inquiry. All her days she had been made to believe that he was slack and incapable—"a waster," his father had once called him in his contemptuous anger—and it was not easy to formulate a list of virtues that would be likely to impress a sceptic. "Well, I should say——"

She paused and went red. No words would come. Roger was a fine fellow, a loyal and loving brother, generous in his sympathies and with his purse, ridiculously honest and self-forgetful—the very qualities one might expect in an amiable fool: the very qualities that would amuse this flippant questioner.

Rosie guessed what was passing in the other's mind and smiled.

"Never mind! You give it up, don't you? If anybody had asked me what I saw in George, I'm blowed if I could have told 'em. It was just a way he had—that, and his money. If he hadn't been well-off, he'd have whistled his lungs empty before I'd have come to him. You can't always say what it is in men that

attracts you, but you *are* attracted, and might as well admit it. Now, do you know, Roger rather took my fancy."

"Really?"

"Don't be jealous on Mary's account, my dear. Roger's a pauper, so there would be no catch in stealing him away. Now shall I tell you what I saw in just the twinkle of an eye when he smiled in my face as he raised his hat?"

She paused and looked quizzically into Florence's eyes, which were sulky if not hostile, and as the firm lips remained closed, she continued:

"I saw a man who'll get anything he wants if he wants it badly enough. Fool he may be, because that woman would make a fool of any man, and if she doesn't want him to want anything, he won't want it. See? Amiable? I daresay; but James and George and a thousand more like them won't move Roger if he sets himself. He's a man, and George is a kid beside him. I'd trust a man like that with my soul."

Florence stared at her. Rosie was not smiling now, and in this more serious mood there was something actually attractive. Florence wondered if she was not so shallow as she seemed; if there were deeps in her nature which she tried to hide.

"Roger and Mary will be your good friends," she said, "if you'll encourage them. *They* won't snub you——"

"Nobody will snub me without getting one back," interrupted Rosie. "I don't feel just comfortable about Mrs. James, but she'll have pins all over her body if she rubs me up the wrong way; she'll tingle for a week after, you bet. I've rehearsed the part till I'm perfect. 'George's dancing-girl,' am I! I'll make her ladyship dance on hot cinders, if she provokes me. But that's just an aside; continue your little speech about the immaculate pair, my dear; and don't eat me or throw the kid at me because I call them that."

Florence controlled herself. Rosie was irritating,

but not as touchy as she had imagined, and for everybody's sake it might be well to remain friendly with her. Besides, it was evident that opposition and outbursts only served to make her more outrageous.

"Rosie," she asked, "have you ever had a real friend?"

"Never!" she replied with emphasis. "I've had to be my own friend all my life, and that friendship's been nearly broken more than once. A friend? No! Crowds of people have petted me and flattered me, and given me presents, but nobody's ever wanted to be a friend. George didn't! You don't!"

"But surely George——!"

"My dear, George is a lover who will by and by turn into a mere husband. He doesn't slough the lover very quickly, I admit, but it's sure to come off in bits, a little to-day and some more to-morrow, and we shall both be more comfortable, I daresay, when he's wriggled out altogether. I hadn't any sentiment to slough—George would tell you so himself. I'm just as warm as an icicle that's got petrified."

"I don't believe it," Florence protested.

"You don't say you want to be my friend," said Rosie. "I'm not blaming you. If you'll be just decently friendly, I shall be quite content; and it's all you need expect from me."

"You're the strangest creature I ever met," said Florence.

Rosie nodded. "I'm good and bad," she said; "mostly bad; but not *too* bad if I'm getting my own way, and having a good time. That's where George comes in. We're good pals and run quite well together in double harness so long as we both want to run the same way; but when we want to go different ways, something will have to break."

"I shall send Mary to you," said Florence.

"Send Roger instead," replied Rosie. "Mary will try to convert me, and I'm not convertible. Gold frames wouldn't suit my complexion."

CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH PROGRESS IS MADE IN SEVERAL DIRECTIONS

OLD Mrs. Wainwright died in November, leaving all her money to charities on the ground that her grandchildren were already sufficiently well provided for. None of them received so much as a trinket.

James returned from the funeral suffering from a sense of wrong which he carried as a cross with an air of resignation that advertised itself conspicuously. George was sulky and furious.

"It was as good as comic opera," said Rosie, as she and Mary sat side by side in George's landau a few days later. They were ascending the steep hill that leads to the moors on the western side of the dale, and the coachman was walking at the horse's head. It was not by any means the first time they had driven out together, and the intimacy between the two afforded George considerable amusement. Rosie was a deep one! A mistress in the subtle art of taking a rise out of unsuspecting, unsophisticated women of Mary's type! He chuckled to himself, and was sure his wife had something up her sleeve that time would reveal—something that would turn out darned funny.

Rosie herself could not quite understand it. She had begun by showing herself in her wildest, wickedest mood, tempting the puritan to preach, watching curiously for the signs that would show that the sharp

shafts had gone home, and she had been disappointed. Mary had only laughed.

"My dear," she had said, "you think you're stripping yourself naked, and all the time you're covering yourself with stage rags that anybody can see don't belong to you."

"I'm trying to shock the Quakeress," Rosie had replied; and the admission was a surrender.

"Of course you are," Mary had said. "You may be a good dancer, child, but you're an indifferent actor. You're too simple-natured, too guileless, for the part you're trying to play. Even a Quakeress can see through you. Drop it, and stick to dancing."

"I'm trying hard not to like you, but it's going to be a struggle," said Rosie; and Mary had laughed again and taken her sister-in-law's arm.

Thereafter Rosie had called at "the cottage," as she persisted in calling it, once a week at least, sometimes carrying Mary off to her own home; on other occasions driving her into the country for a couple of hours and dropping her at some convenient point on the return journey.

"It was as good as comic opera. We lent our carriage to old Clutterbones, and came back together in Jim's. Edie got as far away from me as she could and kept her salts in her hand. Jim sat with his silk hat on his knee and his hands clasped over it with a look on his face that said 'Kind friends, pity a poor man who has lost his all!' George bullied the memory of the poor old woman they all used to toady to, and muttered language that sent up the temperature ten degrees."

Mary laughed. "And how did Rosie behave?"

"Like a winged-cherub! I said it was nice to see Jim's Christian meekness when his heathen brother was raging so furiously, and that I hoped I might one day have my dear sister-in-law's beautiful spirit. My soothing remarks put George into quite a good temper before we parted. Your influence, my dear!"

"Really!" said Mary; "I didn't know I was as bad as all that!"

The coachman was on the box again, driving slowly, for the road had been rough as well as steep. It was a beautiful autumn day, with the compelling hand of winter upon it. On the northern horizon there was a bank of heavy clouds that looked like the treasuries of the snow, but elsewhere the sky was a pale, cold blue. The sun had little power, for its rays filtered through a rimy haze that threw a subdued, diffused light upon the moor and left no shadows on the wide panorama that opened out when the summit was reached. The colouring was wonderful: great stretches of bleached turf, pale as straw; acres upon acres of rusty ling, beautiful in decay, and splashed with spots of dusky green; a hundred mounds washed with warm and even gorgeous tints—oranges, madders, crimsons; long grasses that waved in the breeze and were thinly silvered with frost; the blue-grey ribbon of road winding on and on to the dark-hued plantations far ahead, and bordered with the same straws and greens amid which tall thistles stood regal in their purple robes; and far, far away, ghostly in the mist, the majestic forms of mountains rising above the green, far-stretching plains of the Aire and Ribble.

Mary asked the coachman to stop.

"This is my Delectable Mountain, Rosie," she said. "Now just admit that it's glorious—too glorious for words to describe! Quakeresses are not usually the best singers in the world, but whenever I stand at this point I feel that I want to break out into the *Te Deum*. Now just confess that you've a tiny bit, at least, of the same feeling yourself!—that it sets something dancing inside of you!"

"You're a silly little country mouse," said Rosie, tolerantly. "What you call dancing I call shivering. Drive on, Robinson; it's cold enough to freeze one's marrow on these hilltops, and if it wasn't that it sharpen's one's appetite, you bet I wouldn't come. My soul is such a tiny one that it never gets very

hungry, and a little food of this kind lasts it a long time."

Mary scarcely heard. She was still looking at the hills, and Robinson was humouring her, allowing the horse to walk. "That is the world as God made it," she said; "hardly touched by man and therefore unspoiled. What an artist God is!"

"What a goose Mary is!" laughed Rosie. "Do for goodness sake get a move on, Robinson. I'll pinch you, Mary, if you don't tear your eyes away!" Then she added, reflectively, "I wonder what it feels like to believe in God like that as if you had dinner with Him now and then? It seems to me you all make your own gods just as much as if you carved them out of wood. You say there's only one, and that yours and Jim's is the same; but Jim's religion brings his ears so near together they'll touch one of these days, and yours gives you the sort of sweet look that would cause a saint to stumble."

"He's the same God," said Mary; "and I'm afraid we all see Him through a glass darkly; but some glasses are smoked and others are rose-coloured. None, I fear, are crystal."

"I must be blind, because I don't see Him at all," said Rosie, "unless He's somewhere behind your eyes. Honestly, I don't believe there is a God."

"Anything that you believe honestly," said Mary, "you needn't be ashamed of. There is nothing greater than Truth."

"I'm an infidel," said Rosie doggedly.

"Most of us are," replied Mary; "only we don't always realise it or care to admit it. It's a case of 'Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief' with me, and I daresay with hundreds more. We're not all as candid as you."

"I wish you'd rag me and give me a chance," said Rosie, half-humorously yet with an under-note of irritation.

"Very well," said Mary, "I'll preach at you. One of these days, my dear, your pretty pleasure-craft

will need an anchor, and if you haven't one on board, you'll run on the rocks. That's my puritan's sermon, firstly, secondly and finally, my brethren."

She laughed, but Rosie pouted. "If you don't get cross and nasty, I shall end by hating you," she said.

"Get on with your hating," Mary said in light-hearted imitation of her sister-in-law's style, and then Rosie laughed.

After that they talked on various subjects until they reached the cross-roads, where Mary was to alight.

"Then you won't have tea with me?" Rosie asked petulantly.

"And leave Roger to Mercy's care? My dear, I'm too jealous to run risks."

"You're ridiculously, childishly in love with that great hulking Roger," returned Rosie.

"Strange, but true!" said Mary; "and what is even stranger is that he's ridiculously, childishly in love with me."

Below them was the grey pile of Gapstone Hall, standing with its pleasant farm buildings amidst a cluster of tall trees—beech, elm, sycamore and ash—at the top of the road that winds precipitously down to Lonedale.

"I shan't rest until we are nearer neighbours," said Rosie, as her eyes fell upon it. "I've set my heart on Gapstone. George laughs at me; but you'll see we shall get it by and by, or I'll raise Cain."

"Try faith, hope and charity," laughed Mary. "That's how I wheedle Roger."

"Roger isn't George," said Rosie.

Mrs. Payne was slowly mounting the hill as Mary went down and the two met at the vicarage gate.

"Mary," began the older woman, "is that husband of yours a wizard?"

"Why?" asked Mary.

"Because the change that has come over Frank is like black magic. I'd a letter from him this morning so full of enthusiasm that his father says it's a case for two medical certificates. They've got the works

started at Coventry, and he assures us that the other partner or director or whatever the proper title is, is delighted with the cars they're beginning to turn out."

"I know," said Mary. "We had a letter from Mr. Watmough this morning, and he's as level-headed a fellow as Yorkshire ever bred, Roger says. He's convinced that Frank's improvements and inventions will revolutionise the trade. Already they could do with a place twice as big; they can't grapple with the orders. Roger wired to say he'll go down to-morrow. We always told you Frank was a genius."

"He'd have been on our hands yet if it hadn't been for Roger," said Mrs. Payne, her tired voice warming as she made the acknowledgment. "Frank can master problems but not men—he's putty in their hands; he can invent things, but he can't sell them. Then Roger comes along with this Mr. Watmough, who has an eye like a hawk's, and can see weak spots in both men and machines, though he couldn't invent anything new if he was to lay his life down, and in six months all is changed."

"Yes," said Mary heartily, "Mr. Watmough was just the man Frank needed."

"And Roger was the man they both needed," Mrs. Payne went on. "Roger sees what must be done, and the next day it's being done. That's why I call him a wizard. I shan't soon forget the afternoon that he brought this Mr. Watmough to fix up things with Frank and his father. 'Now, then,' he says, 'you want a shop. Coventry's the place, you think, Watmough? Then come on, we'll go to Coventry to-morrow and see what's to be done; and we'll plan out a thing or two in the train. We shall never get anywhere by standing in the sidings; let's get on to the main line.'"

Mary laughed and moved away. The praise was sweet to her ears. Those who did not know him well still thought Roger easy-going because he never seemed to be doing anything, was never in a hurry, had always

plenty of time for conversation. Even yet he lounged about the mills with his hands in his pockets—a practice his father had particularly detested—and preferred hanging over a high desk instead of sitting in a chair when he was compelled to use a pen. He wrote, however, as little as possible; what was there to write about that Gladys Stephenson couldn't do better and more quickly on the machine?

It was the same in the mill. Why should he vex his soul over the hundred trivial details that were magnified into seriousness by weft-lads and warp-dressers and weavers and menders when there was a cute old fellow like Uncle Steve who was paid to have his soul vexed, and to vex other people's? His business, he explained to Ted Freeman—who was a Communist in theory, though Communism had no party in those days—was "to watch them that watch such as you and see that you earn your brass;" and when Ted growled out the protest that it must be grand to have naught to do but walk about with your hands in your pockets and live on what hard-working folks addled (earned), he simply replied: "You're right, lad; it *is* grand."

Those, however, who had eyes and saw knew better. They knew that every loom could not be kept running unless some master mind was wide-awake and alert. Stephen Metcalfe's misgivings lasted a month, and were then succeeded by a confidence that couldn't be shaken.

"We're rammed out wi' orders, lass," he told his wife a few weeks later. "Where Roger conjures 'em up from beats me, but they just pour in. I've never known us be busier; and a better feelin' in t' place there couldn't be."

"It 'ud seem him better," said his wife, "if he'd leave his fishing till t' Setterda' afternooin. It's a poor example a maister sets to laik (play) while other fowk wark."

"Aye, but that's where you're mista'en," replied Stephen. "When aught bothers him, that's where he

goes to wrastle wi' it. Some 'ud shut theirselves up i' their offices, but Roger's always been a lad for t' open air, and if he doesn't kill two birds wi' one stone, he catches two fish wi' one hook.

"I'll tell you what it is, lass," he went on, dragging out the words with slow emphasis; "Roger's never been the idle-back we all reckoned him. There's naught I can learn him about wevying, and there's a deal he can learn me. He braids o' one o' them big wheels in a clock—you can't see it move, but if you shift it t' works'll stop."

Roger kept nothing back from Mary, and the partnership was more than a formality. It pleased her to be taken into consultation, and to know that her opinions were not dismissed the moment they reached the ear, but carefully weighed and often acted upon.

"I've taken another into the company, Mary," he said as they ate their meal on this November evening. She looked up quickly, but when he turned his eyes on to the picture of the Rich Young Ruler, her quick wit read his meaning.

"You'll have a very worried partner," she said smiling.

"Aye, but what he says is to the point," he replied. "We'd a claim made on us to-day for some damaged pieces, but the merchant seemed a bit doubtful whether it was our fault or the dyers'. Uncle Steve and Ben Hardaker said that nobody on earth could prove that it was our fault."

"'But is it?' I said; 'that's what I want to know."

"Uncle Steve looked at Ben, and Ben looked at his boots, and I knew what that meant.

"'Come,' I said, 'own up!'

"'Well,' says Ben, 'between us three it *is* our fault,' and he told me how it had happened.

"'What'll it mean, if we take to it?' Uncle Steve said.

"'It'll mean twenty pounds,' I told him.

"'Tell'em there's no proof, but you'll meet 'em," said Ben.

"'Would Joe Holmes have done that?' I asked him.

"'He'd have seen 'em at blazes,' said Ben.

"'Well, now, look here, both of you,' I said. 'If I was to put my hand in your pocket, Ben, and steal your purse, you'd have me locked up, and you'd do right. But if I rob Adams's or their dyers, you'll say I've done a bit o' smart business, and am fit to lend out. Now let me tell you this—a chap who'll rob his customer 'll rob his hands, if he gets a chance; you've got to keep your eye on him. It's going to be a rule of this concern that when we make a mistake we own up to it and pay. There's going to be no fouls in this game we're playing, Ben—we'll play straight.'

"Then I looked 'em in the face. 'Is that right?' I said.

"'Aye, it's right enough,' Ben said; 'but it isn't t' way to make brass.'

"'I'm none so sure of that,' I said; 'but if we can't win without cheating, we'll lose like sportsmen.'"

"And where did the new partner come in?" Mary asked.

"He didn't come in: he *was* in," Roger answered. "That young fellow haunts me; but he isn't a bad sort of a pal when you get to know him, and I'm a listener when he starts talking."

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH WE VISIT THE BUTTERSCOTCH ESTABLISHMENT

ON the morning of the last day of the year, James and George were standing near the window in the latter's office discussing an act of rebellion that threatened to result in a strike. A casual glance would have shown that the brothers were not in agreement, and the frown on James's brow deepened as George's tone became more provocative.

"You sit up there in your swagger Olympus and think you've nothing to do but hurl your thunderbolts and the whole earth'll tremble. There isn't as much trembling being done as in the old man's day, let me tell you, and there's going to be less——"

The sound of a passing conveyance on the road below attracted the notice of both, and George smiled significantly, and added:

"You'd do well to take a leaf out of that idle young ruler's book. Roger may be idle and he may be a darned fool, but he's flesh and blood among his hands and doesn't try to be a tin god!"

James's face took on the colour of parchment, and George involuntarily stepped back a pace and withdrew his hands from his pocket.

"That's what they call you in there," he said, jerking his head sideways towards the mill, and with a hint of apology in his tone. "There's no respect for masters now-a-days."

Colour was slowly returning to James's cheeks. "I could almost think you'd been drinking, George," he said sternly. "You're allowing yourself a licence that's going to breed trouble all round if it continues. This constant friction between partners—and brothers——"—the very mention of the word produced a diminuendo of severity so that the voice became charged with the tone of patient forbearance that was more aggravating than anger—"is bound to have its effect on the hands, who are quick enough to discern dissension in their masters and to take advantage of it——"

"For heaven's sake, Jim," George broke in irritably, "get down from your stilts and talk like a manufacturer and not like a blooming professor. If talk 'ud run the mills we should be working two shifts instead of having fifty looms standing. Roger is putting work out, they tell me——"

"Don't bring Roger into the conversation," said James with something of George's impatience. "He's rubbed in at every turn, and I'm sick of hearing his name. Roger is riding for a fall, only most people are too blind to see it. He's certain to come to grief before long and I don't care how soon. Don't give me any more Roger!"

"Very well," sneered George, "you can put the telescope to your blind eye and you won't see him; but he's there, mind you, and I'm not sure that he's the darned fool we've taken him to be. Rosie puts all her money on him, and swears he'll bust us yet——"

James made an impatient gesture. "Rosie's opinion may be of value on some subjects," he said scathingly, "but hardly, I imagine, on this."

It was not an unwarrantable remark but it drove George to heated speech. It was not so much the words themselves as the contempt that underlay them that stirred his anger.

"I'd trust Rosie's judgment a darn sight sooner than yours! She has her feet on the earth, anyway, and doesn't cover her eyes with blinkers. It's you

that's the fool, Jim. Here's a man we call an idleback with a blooming five thousand can start three businesses and every one of 'em a winner, and has everybody's good word into the bargain. Folk like a man they can talk to; and you're too darned supercilious for a job like this. Nobody wants tin gods in business: they don't want a man who sucks his words till they're as smooth as pebbles and as hard as flint."

James turned on his heel. "You'll find me in my room when you're ready to discuss business," he said shortly.

"In your tin Olympus," shouted George.

* * * * * * *

Roger's dogcart—his "trap," as he called it—was by this time well on its way to the neighbouring town of Keeley. A fine glow was on Mary's face, for the wind was biting, and Roger held himself proudly as he returned the greetings of acquaintances when the busy streets were reached.

"It's you they're staring at, lass o' mine," he said. "They're telling themselves that Roger Laycock's a lucky beggar, and it's as true as Gospel."

"You're a sentimental Tommy," said Mary. "Everybody but you knows that I'm one of the most ordinary of ordinary women. It used to trouble me until I remembered that the extraordinary is dependent on the ordinary; that the loveliest flowers grow in common soil, and couldn't bloom without it."

"Ordinary!" exclaimed Roger. "Nay, lass, you may deceive yourself but you won't deceive me!"

They turned away from the main roads and drew up at the door of an unpretentious building in a side street. There were so many similar buildings adjacent to it that it was impossible to judge its extent, but once inside it was easy to see that the dimensions were not insignificant. A large portion, however, was as yet unoccupied—"the business is only a kid but it'll grow," Roger had said to Sam; "we must have his trousers long enough to start with and run a tuck in 'em for a while."

That was exactly to Sam's mind, and the "trousers" he suggested would have fitted a full-grown business, but Roger exercised his veto.

"Nay, nay, lad, we mustn't spend all our capital on one year's rent. It isn't a mausoleum for our brass we're wanting."

It was he who found the warehouse and got it cheap on a ten year's lease.

"Ten years!" Betty had exclaimed. "Dear heart, the world'll be full of butterscotch long before that time!"

"Not it," laughed Roger. "The world'll lick it away as fast as we turn it out, and hold its hands out for more. There's naught like a trade that makes stuff for folks to swallow. We'll have one swallow feeding another for a trademark—good idea, that, by gen!"

Betty was still fearful, overwhelmed by what seemed to her the colossal undertaking to which the new firm was committed. She looked very sweet and trim in her clean white overalls and mob cap as she greeted Mary and kissed her, wholly indifferent to the presence of onlooking subordinates.

"I don't think I can stand it much longer, love," she said. "I get all moithered, and my head goes round and round till I'm no use at all. I see naught but ruin in front of us, I don't really, for this young man Roger has brought into the office is planning to spend money like water."

"Mr. Blythman, you mean; the advertising director?" Mary inquired with a smile.

"Blythman enough!" Betty answered. "He'll be blithe when we're all in the workhouse and he's passed on to bring somebody else to grief. Hundreds and thousands of bills and show-cards and nonsense o' that sort you'll see piled up in the warehouse, with 'Binns un-Beatable Butterscotch' on 'em in all sorts of colours, and such daft pictures as you never set eyes on. I fair shame to see 'em in the shop windows."

Mary laughed outright, but Betty's face remained grave.

"I can't see a joke in it," she continued. "Sam says he's paying this young man three times as much as *he* was getting when he left the Co-op., and that Roger knows all about it. Paying him to throw money down the gutter, I call it, for instead of a twist o' paper to carry t' sweeties his lordship must have all makes and shapes o' boxes, tied up with ribbon and covered with pictures. Eh, dear! eh, dear! Mary, I could wish we were back at Carr Bottom again. I'm worried out o' my wits the day through."

Roger came up whilst Mary was trying to reassure her.

"Well, how's the senior partner?" he inquired in his bluff way. "Going strong, Betty?"

"Nay, I'm going weak, Roger," she replied. "I thought I'd learned in whatsoever state I was therewith to be content, as we're told in the Book, but I can't be content to live in a grand house and know we're going to the dogs as fast as Sam and this young man you've got can drive us."

"Now, then, what's the matter?" inquired Roger, genuinely concerned by Betty's evident sincerity.

He took her by the arm affectionately and led her into a sparsely-furnished room that was labelled "Private." There he made her sit down whilst Mary perched on the table and he himself stood with his back to the fire.

She repeated the story of her anxieties, and when she had finished he would not banter her, though a smile that was compounded of sympathy and amusement lit up his face.

"How's Miss Midgley doing?" he asked. "Nicely?"

"Very nicely," she replied; "and the girls like her."

"Well, now," he said, with a mischievous glance at Mary, "I must see Blythman and find out what he's up to. You can trust me, Betty, to keep my eye on both him and Sam, and if I find 'em over-running the constable I'll pull 'em up. I fancy you'll be happier

to chuck business and look after that grand house o' yours at five and twenty pounds a year rent. This place is bad for your rheumatism, and now that you've got us started we shall manage nicely. That silk dress I mentioned a while back'll suit you better than these aprons."

Sam made light of his mother's distress when Roger mentioned it, but agreed that she would be better away from the establishment. There was an unction in the way Sam pronounced the word that printed it in large capitals—ESTABLISHMENT!

"I've been thinking I'd buy her a pony-carriage," he said. "She'd then be able to drive over and see Mary and her old friends at Carr Bottom."

"You'll do naught o' the sort," said Roger bluntly. "It doesn't run to pony carriages yet, and your mother knows it. Let her go her own way and don't bluster or she'll have a stroke. An old body like her hasn't wind enough to go as fast as a jackass, and, you know, Sam, you *are* a jackass."

Gentleman Sam let his eyes drop. He was well dressed and very conscious of it; but then, as he told himself, one never knew what important customer might call at any moment. He did not see Roger's eyes travel down his body from his tie to his shoes; but he felt them and was uncomfortable.

"I'll tell you what it is, Sam," said Roger. "You'd make a rare good Wainwright"; and Sam wondered why the remark was accompanied by a chuckle.

"Well, how are things going?" Roger inquired as the other made no reply.

"Not so bad," was the answer, the short sentence being substituted as an afterthought when the single word "Fine!" was on his lips. "We're sending three sample cases to Canada this week, and have opened up eight new wholesale accounts in this country."

"That's good!" said Roger. "Let's have a look at the books. We've a bit of a rush on to-day, Mary and me, because being New Year's Eve we're having a feed and a dance for the mill-folk. We've all been

working hard, and a jollification is just about due. If you were there you'd see me leading off with Selina Hardaker—the oldest weaver in Lonedale and booby-prize winner at a beauty show. We're in for a great time, my lad, so let's get a hustle on."

"Poor old Betty!" The exclamation came with a short laugh from Roger's lips after a period of silence as Mary and he drove home. "I believe it 'ud kill her if she was to stop on and see what's coming. I shall be surprised if the 'Three B's' don't beat both the mill and the motors hollow. Why, lass, orders are tumbling in like a sack o' coals down a grate, and Sam sees himself mayor o' Keeley in a year or two with a handle to his name."

"It isn't Sam's doing," said Mary, as proud of her husband's management as he of her good looks and good nature.

"A lot of it is," he replied. "Sam isn't all swagger, and he's a job that suits him down to the ground. When these London fellows come to see what sort of concern the 'Three B's' is Sam puts 'em in his pocket. Did you notice the board he's fixed up on the door that leads to the unoccupied part of the premises? You didn't? 'Strictly private. No admittance except on business. He has his points, has Sam."

"You've a wonderful way of seeing the best in people and bringing it out," said Mary. "*You're* not ordinary. Rosie says you're a genius."

Roger laughed lightly. "I like to see other fellows work while I look on," he said. "There's a deal more fun in the game, lass, than I ever reckoned on, and we're only on the first lap yet. You wait a bit. I'm just warming to my job. We're sinking brass now, and I don't wonder poor old Betty loses her hair when she sees what there is to pay for, but in two years' time we shall be raking it in like them fellows at Monte Carlo."

"And then?" Mary tried to make her tone light, but Roger was sensitive to every inflection and he looked

inquiringly into the face that was upturned to meet his eyes.

"Afraid the devil'll get me then, eh, my lass?" he said, but Mary shook her head.

"Not afraid," she replied brightly. "It wasn't even a misgiving. It was just a thought that came and peeped round the door of my mind and shouted a warning before it turned and ran. I didn't even have to chase it away."

"What did it shout?" he asked, as he lightly flicked his whip over the horse's back.

"'The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word and he becometh unfruitful,'" she answered readily.

"Aye, and it's true," he replied, "and we shall have to watch it. I'll bet our Jim carries a sight more care than I do. Business is no care to me because it's same as an instinct that I've naught to do but follow. Some men are that way. I've been on the moor with gamekeepers who were lost in a fog—no more idea than a four-year-old which way home lay. *I* was never lost; Follow me,' I says, 'and you'll be all right.' Instinct, that's what it is: and it's the same with business."

Mary smiled. "You haven't answered my question," she said. She knew in her heart that he would make money, and she was perhaps deceiving herself when she denied that she was afraid. At any rate the disloyal thought retreated never far from the door of her mind.

"I've forgotten what it was," Roger replied.

"I asked 'What then?' When money is rolling in and you are becoming rich—what then?"

It was all too remote to bring any cloud upon her brow, but Roger did not laugh the suggestion away.

"Well, what 'ud you like?" he asked. "Gapstone Hall, if Rosie hasn't got it by that time? A houseful o' servants and a gallery o' pictures? Brass'll buy 'em."

"I want none of those things," said Mary. "We are so happy as we are, and the things best worth having are what money can't buy. I wonder if I'm just a weeny bit afraid of the deceitfulness of riches?—afraid lest riches will change us?"

"I'm sure you are," he said; "but it isn't yourself you're afraid of—it's me. You know money'll never snare you, but your heart says 'Roger's a Laycock, and when he's made money it'll be same as a god to him as it was to his father before him. And then, eh dear me! he'll put me in the second place or maybe the third; and I shall be heartbroken because he doesn't love me any more.'"

"Roger!" she protested.

"Aye, but I'm telling you!" he said. "There's the cares o' this world we've got to watch as well as the deceitfulness of riches, and that's what's going to choke you, my lass, if you let it grow. If you're going to worry all the time for fear brass shackles me and makes a slave of me you'll sup a deal o' sorrow that you've mixed yourself."

"I'm not worrying, Roger, really."

"Mind you," he went on; "I've studied it all out for myself. I *am* Laycock, but I'm Metcalfe too. One'll counteract the other; and I'm running for the race I tell you; not for the cup."

"I'm ashamed of myself, Roger," said Mary. "Do you really think I imagined all that?"

"I fancy it was at the back of your mind," he replied. "It was at the back o' mine when I saw yon fellow's face in the picture, but I said 'Nay lad; I'll not have a look like yours for all the brass that was ever coined.' And I won't! When you see me in danger o' forgetting the rules of the game—when you see me beginning to play for myself and not for my side—when I've no time to hearken to the voice of the moor and the beck, and the love o' money seems to be coming before the love of God and the lass He gave me to be my wife—you just set me in front of that young fellow. It'll be enough!"

"It won't be necessary," said Mary brightly. "I know it won't."

"When thoughts come and peep round the door of your mind," said Roger with a laugh; "just you grab the little beggars and bring 'em inside and ask 'em what they mean. They'll not come again, then. We'll keep our eyes open, lass o' mine—you and me. It's the *love* o' riches that we've to watch; and that's a snare that many a poor man gets his foot in as well as the rich."

END OF PART ONE

PERIOD TWO

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH THE STORY IS RESUMED SEVEN YEARS LATER

IN spite of an air of overdone magnificence the breakfast-room at Gapstone Hall was a cheerful apartment. Its windows admitted the morning sun and overlooked a prospect of considerable charm—a green valley studded with woodlands; low-lying hills, coloured grey with the smoke that rose from factory chimneys and the stacks of clustered dwellings; range upon range of loftier heights, the nearer ones tinted with moorland shades, the more distant, hazy and vaporous, like faintly outlined clouds. The park in which the Hall stood made a pleasant picture, for if its trees were not exactly imposing and its stretches of sward remarkable either for extent or orderliness, there was yet a distinguished look about it that impressed all visitors and gave added dignity to the solidly-built, stone-roofed, three-storeyed mansion that had interesting architectural features without being in any way stately or beautiful.

It pleased George well enough, but it was Rosie who sucked the full measure of satisfaction from the pride of possession. James and Edie were no longer envied. Carr Hall might be more imposing from the conventional point of view; but Gapstone had romance attached to it for it had figured in a famous novel, and visitors from far and near stole up the drive to obtain a glimpse of it.

Rosie glanced round the room as George slit open the

letters. Time had dealt kindly with her figure and features, though art had lent a hand to modify Time's chiselling and neutralise his influence. Rosie was now thirty—"getting into the sere and yellow" (as she complained to her maid in the hope that the acknowledgment would call forth a contradiction), "in ten years time I shall be an old woman!"

There were no signs of this approaching disaster; her form was still girlish, her cheeks full and delicately-tinted; her hair thick, abundant, richly-coloured; her hands shapely and not too plump.

The glance satisfied her. Everything was good and substantial and more modern than anything Jim had. The principal of the swagger Broadbeck firm that had undertaken the job—a gentleman and connoisseur—had soon plumbed the shallows of her mind and had sought to please her—at some sacrifice of conscience.

The glance passed over her daughter, Nell, who was carefully tapping an egg and removing the shell, particle by partic le, and rested on her husband. There it ceased to be a glance and became an amused contemplation.

George was thirty-two and looked ten years older. His hair was thin on the top and grey at the temples. An irritating, chronic indigestion had paled his cheeks and brought hollows there. He was thin and his shoulders were slightly bent. At present a frown was on his brow, but frowns came so easily and were made so welcome that Rosie was only amused.

He dropped the sheet he had been scanning with an impatient exclamation, and looking up saw contemptuously-indulgent humour in his wife's eyes.

"It's all very well for you to sit there and grin when a bill a yard long comes in for your extravagances," he burst out hotly. "It's the very devil! £150 for fool fripperies that you'll be tired of when you've worn them once—if you ever do wear them! It was over a hundred last quarter——"

"And will be twice as much next," interrupted Rosie, who had already broken in on the outburst to bid Nell pass her the marmalade. She spoke with

quiet unconcern, neither injured nor angry. "My dear George, get on with your breakfast and don't fume. There's no wonder your stomach kicks when you treat it so badly, and it re-acts on your temper, naturally. Make a good meal, and then go into the library and sign half-a-dozen cheques and I'll fill them in for you when you've gone down to business, and you'll have no further trouble. There are enough bills in the pile you haven't opened yet to give you apoplexy."

George's eyes blazed, and his hands shook so much that he was forced to lay down the knife and fork he had just picked up.

"I've told you over and over again," he said, "that I won't have it. You spent thousands on the house, and you go on spending as if money rained down from heaven. You'll ruin me, I tell you, if this goes on. I'll bet Edie doesn't spend one-tenth part of what you do on her dress though she's a fortune of her own."

Rosie buttered a piece of toast as she replied—"Edie, my dear George, is a careful soul, like her husband. She dresses well, but it hurts her to pay the bills, because, you see, it opens a little vein that allows her fortune to bleed away. It isn't quite nice to trot her out as an example, and I hope you're not going to follow it up by quoting my other local sister-in-law. Fifty pounds a year for dress will leave Mary a margin for charity. I know. Mary's a dear; but if I wore frocks like hers you'd divorce me. Do let Fleming bring in some warm bacon."

"Warm bacon be ——!" He did not complete the sentence because he saw the child's head turn slowly in his direction and the eyes look wonderingly into his. Rosie was amused.

"The lion had better lie down with the lamb," she said, laughing merrily. "Now please, George, accept your young daughter's rebuke. If we've spent thousands you've—sorry I can't say 'we've'—thousands upon thousands left, so why worry? Pay up like a man and smile over it. Why, you look at this minute as if the dentist were standing over you—or the hangman!"

George pushed his plate away. "I've done with breakfast," he said. "Your reckless folly——"

"Don't, George dear!" she said soothingly—at least the tone was soothing—"Give yourself time to think things over and you'll find there's going to be no deluge because I've found it necessary to replenish my wardrobe. As women grow older they have to dress with more care, and you'd be awfully mad if I looked an old frump—you know you would. Get on with your meal and then go and see St. James, and when you come home I'll have ever such a nice little digestible lunch for you—you never grudge money on food, I will say that for you—and you'll feel heaps better."

He was at white heat now, but a glance at the child's face which had never changed its expression of passionless curiosity checked the words that were on his lips. He gathered up his papers and left the room, and Rosie poured herself another cup of coffee.

"I think I must arrange for you to have breakfast in the nursery at the storm periods," she said to the child. "They only come like quarter days four times a year."

"You made daddy furious," said Nell, fixing her large eyes inquiringly on her mother's face. "You often make him furious—why do you?"

"It's poor daddy's stomach," replied her mother calmly. "Eat your breakfast slowly, and don't ask questions, or *your* stomach will kick and make you ill-tempered."

Nell continued to look at her thoughtfully for almost a minute; then stretched out her hand for the honey jar. She seemed to be pondering the matter in her mind, but she did not speak again and there was silence until the meal ended.

George walked down to the mill in a savage mood. He had been baffled again, for the hundredth time, and the knowledge that Rosie could always get the better of him induced a vile temper. Despite numberless provocations he had never yet regretted his marriage, though he regretted some of his wife's qualities. On

the whole she suited him very well. Her smartness, when it was exercised on other people, appealed to his sense of humour ; when it was used as a whip to scourge Jim and Edie it afforded him positive pleasure. She had always showed him reasonable affection though not, perhaps, of the true wifely kind, and she had given him no more cause for jealousy than might be expected from a woman admittedly attractive. She laughed, however, at endearments and would allow neither her husband nor her child to be demonstrative, and George sometimes felt defrauded when he saw how loving she could be with Mary. That was a sore point. She would put her arm round Mary's waist, would kiss her and fondle her, when she had no such caresses for husband or child. She showed more affection for him than for Nell, and though he did not exactly resent this it was a symptom that he found disturbing. Her elegance, her taste in dress, pleased him and made him proud, but the satisfaction was bought at a dear price. He was not so rich by many thousands as he had been when he married, and there was no disputing the fact that this was chiefly due to his wife's extravagance which, like his dyspepsia, became more pronounced every year.

The thought of these things drove him into the " Malt Shovel " when he reached Carr Bottom, where he sought to steady himself with a whisky and soda. It was beginning to be a habit, a necessity—just one glass ; never more than two. His stomach never kicked at whisky.

James had been in his room a full half-hour when George entered, and it was unfortunate that this was one of the occasions when George's stomach had called for two whiskies. His breath proclaimed the fact and added fuel to the fire of his brother's remonstrances.

" They were wanting you in the mill when I came, over half-an-hour ago," James said, without returning the formality of George's " Good-morning." " There's something wrong with the engine, and we can't afford to have it stopped for half-an-hour whilst you indulge

your appetite for strong drink. Intemperance has brought many a man and many a firm to bankruptcy. I warn you, George, that if you're going to let it drag you there it shan't drag me."

George looked at him. It would be ridiculous to assert that a couple of glasses, even on an empty stomach, had made him drunk, but he was not quite himself. Usually he burst out in a flame of scorching retorts and threatenings, but now he merely glared at his brother, who was gazing sternly at him from his chair with the width of the table between them.

James looked the younger of the two now, though he also was becoming bald. His features, however, had undergone little change ; he was still solemn, still smug, still refined ; carefully dressed and prosperous in appearance.

The eyes of the two brothers met in hostile opposition. James's thoughts were ready marshalled ; George was collecting his.

" I'm not going to mince my words this time," James went on. " ' Faithful are the wounds of a friend,' and it is as a friend that I speak though my words may sound harsh. You've depleted your capital ; your salary account is considerably overdrawn ; you're going the road to ruin by quick stages—have been ever since you married that woman ; and it has got to stop. I say it has got to stop. I hope you are not too tipsy to take my meaning."

For answer George seized a light ruler that lay near his hand on the table and hurled it at his brother's head.

" Take that, you canting humbug ! " he said in a low, passionate voice.

James had no time to raise an arm. The ruler caught him on the cheek bone and a dark, red line indicated the force of the impact. The rest of the face became grey, then white. James was sick with pain, but remained master of himself.

" That ends it," he said ; " ' a house divided against itself cannot stand.' One of us must retire from this

business, George. You cannot pay me out and I can pay you out. Shall we see Clutterton to-day ? "

" You can see either Clutterton or the devil," returned George ; and turned on his heel.

When he had left the room James remained at the desk, lost in thought. The pain in his face was intense and the cheek was swollen to twice its size, but he did not bathe it though water was in the room. In his heart he was welcoming the occurrence and pluming himself on his self-restraint. He searched his memory and found nothing in his words to regret : he had a conscience void of offence. The reflection pleased him.

After a while he rose and went to the safe which was cunningly concealed behind the oak panelling. From it he withdrew a document with the words " Articles of Partnership " engrossed upon the outer fold and examined it without returning to his seat. It was as he had thought : the agreement for a term of five years was at an end and it was now a partnership at will that could be dissolved at any time.

He replaced the document and returned to the desk, taking with him the thin, leather-bound ledger which contained the partnership accounts. These he studied carefully for a considerable time, and became so absorbed in his reflections that the pain in his face ceased to trouble him. He had a poor opinion of his brother's astuteness, and was considering what opportunities of enrichment this new movement might be made to yield.

George's misdeeds had not amounted to what the lawyers called " tort "—there had been no misdemeanour for which damages might be claimed and which could be made the basis of a bargain. James at that moment would have welcomed any evidence of wrong-doing on his brother's part which would have enabled him to hold the whip over him and drive a good bargain, but there was none, and he would have to trust to his own superior acumen and finesse. He was not likely to be worsted in the transaction. He smiled as the

reflection struck his mind, and closing the book, rang his bell, and bade a clerk summon Mr. George.

He came at once. He had cooled down and was prepared to express regret for what had happened, but his spirit was just as defiant as before. The sight of his brother's face, by this time frightfully discoloured as well as swollen, humbled him, however, and in a tone of genuine self-condemnation he said:

"I say, old man, I'm awfully sorry. I don't know how I came to let myself go——"

The look in James's eyes stopped him. It was not stern or cold, but just aggravatingly patient and reproachful—"the sort of look," George afterwards explained to Rosie, "that old Sebastian must have had when they jabbed their arrows into him." It dried up the stream of sympathetic apology at its source.

He stopped dead, and James answered him.

"I can tell you, George." The voice was low and pained, interpreting the look. He paused a moment or two, allowing his eyes to speak before he continued. He was so seated that the light fell full on his injured cheek, and he was not unconscious of the advantage this gave him. "Drink is becoming your master. It has troubled me to see the hold it is obtaining over you, and though I can hardly expect you to give any heed to my warnings, I do warn you. You have naturally a hot temper and drink inflames it. Some day you will strike one who is not your brother, one who has not your brother's forbearance, and the judge or the magistrate will deal with you then."

George rapped out a hasty oath, but James stopped him with a gesture.

"I beg you not to use language of that kind here," he said more sternly. "In this room where the eyes of our father look down upon us both from the wall"—he lifted his own eyes to the portrait as he spoke, and allowed them to rest there reverentially—"I must ask you to observe the decencies of conversation."

"I wonder if you know, Jim," said George, "what a

darned Pharisee you are! I've told you I'm sorry, and I am, but I'm hanged if I'll stand here to be preached to as if I was a drunkard. I've never been drunk in my life, but if there's one thing would send me over the line it would be your smug sermons. Give 'em a rest and let me be knowing why you sent for me."

James sighed. "We were good friends, George, in the old days before you mar—— I should say before father died——"

The blood rushed to George's face again, and he broke in hotly,

"Stop that! Don't imagine that you deceive me by your thoughtful substitutions. You held the word back to give it more sting! You're a dirty cad, Jim, and I'm darned if I'll stop with you a day longer than I can help. If it's the dissolution of the partnership you're wanting to discuss let us get to business."

He pulled a chair forward noisily and sat down with a black scowl on his brow. James looked at him with the same patient, reproachful eyes.

"I was hoping, George," he said, "that we might adjust our difference without proceeding to extreme measures——"

"You're lying, Jim," said George. "You're wanting me out; I know you are. You'll quote Scripture by the yard, but you'll do your level best to strike a good bargain for yourself and make money out of the job. Well, go on; let me hear how much you propose to fine me for painting your face. I won't interrupt you."

"I think perhaps you are right," said James. "My heart and my judgment have been in conflict, but for the firm's sake, for the credit of Wainwrights, these continual altercations must cease. It is a small matter that you misunderstand me——"

"I tell you I don't misunderstand you," George interrupted fiercely. "I know you better than you know yourself, and I know you'll tell everybody that I forced you to it: that you did your level best to persuade me to listen to wise counsel, but all in vain. And you'll shake your head, like a doctor at a dying man's

bedside, and blow your nose to hide your emotion, and expect folk to say what a good brother you are and what a darned scamp George is. Look here, Jim, you're fond of Scripture—I'll give you the text that's attached to another dirty cad—'What thou doest, do quickly!'"

They were hot, unmeasured words, but any veiled allusion to what was regarded as the misfortune of his marriage invariably caused him to lose all self-restraint, and the changed look that came into his brother's eyes merely gratified him.

"I will ring up Cluttertons and make an appointment," said James. "You may be sure I will lose no time."

"Get 'em rung up, then," said George, "and put your clever heads together. I've no doubt you'll manage to diddle me between you!"

CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH EDIE IS SOMEWHAT DISTURBED

THE extensive grounds of Carr Hall and the mansion itself had never looked more beautiful. Edie Laycock's guests thought so and said so to their hostess's satisfaction as they sipped tea on the lawn. It was quite secluded there, with a belt of forest trees between them and the road and nothing in front of them but parkland and the well-wooded valley flanked by high hills.

They were all well-to-do or they would not have been on visiting terms with the James Laycocks, and they all lived in large houses, but none of them had so fine a view or a park of such extent.

There were three guests. Mrs. Haley and her daughter-in-law were near neighbours and had driven across —their fat coachman and slim footman, immaculately attired in blue coats, white breeches and tall hats with cockades, were at that moment inspecting the new Florence car which Mrs. Mallinson had just acquired, and making deprecatory remarks to the soberly-clad chauffeur. This was in the courtyard at the back of the Hall, of course, and the chauffeur in his sober plum coloured livery sat on the step of the car and smoked cigarettes in dignified silence, knowing quite well that the criticisms were inspired by ignorance and envy.

The July morning had been brilliantly fine, but almost unbearably hot. Afternoon, however, had brought light clouds and a cool breeze from the north-

west, and it was pleasant to sit on the open lawn in comfortable cane chairs shaded by gay Japanese umbrellas, and partake of a daintily-served tea. Edie's youngest child, Geoffrey (she had four now, all boys), was rolling a ball on the grass, never straying far from his mother's side, and all the time under the watchful eye of his nurse who was seated some distance away, sewing.

"It looks as if you had stood between the Laycocks and the extinction of the family name," said Mrs. Haley, her eye on the boy. "Poor George has only the one girl, I believe; and the other brother, Roger, has no children, I am told."

Edie agreed. In her heart she wished one of the boys had been a girl, but she never let this be known.

"Why 'poor' George?" inquired Mrs. Mallinson. She was younger than the others, and living some distance away was not so well-informed.

"My dear—think of that impossible woman, his wife!" replied Mrs. Haley.

"Never met her," said Mrs. Mallinson. "What about the other sister-in-law, Mrs. Roger Laycock?"

"Roger is Jim's half-brother," Edie explained placidly. "They have nothing in common, so we never meet. I scarcely know his wife, but she's quite a decent woman, I believe."

"Really! as bad as that," laughed Mrs. Mallinson, who was amused and interested.

"I like Mary—Mrs. Roger's name is Mary"—Jean Haley explained to Mrs. Mallinson, who turned to her with smiling eyes.

"And I like Roger," she replied.

Edie was not pleased, and Mrs. Haley saw it, and sought to change the conversation, but her daughter-in-law failed to catch her eye.

"You know Roger, then?" she asked.

"He's the chairman of the Florence Company—my car's a Florence, you know—and my husband is a large shareholder. By the way, Mrs. Laycock, he tells me it is called after your husband's sister. I should be

proud to have such a car called by my name; but 'The Peggy' would sound more suggestive of the domestic wash, wouldn't it?"

Edie smiled faintly—no one had ever known her to laugh.

"Florence married Frank Payne, the engineer," she said. "He is a very clever man—a genius in his way, I understand."

"There is no doubt of that," Mrs. Mallinson continued, quite unaware that the conversation was distasteful to her hostess. "My husband knows a good deal about cars and he says there isn't one to touch the Florence. But Mr. Roger Laycock is the brain of the business. Arthur has a great admiration for him. He is a fine business-man himself, but he told me one day that there isn't a man in ten thousand with the quick initiative and remarkable intuitions of the chairman."

Edie was apparently giving divided attention. She was bending down to draw up the boy's socks and getting very red in the effort. Mrs. Mallinson just glanced at her and went on speaking to the others.

"He's rather a wonderful man, don't you think, even in this neighbourhood of wonderful men? There's the Binns Beebee Company of which he's also chairman. It's a little gold mine! Why, when we were married five years ago they'd just one factory, and now they've four—and will have to build before long. I'm a shareholder, my dear. Arthur gave me five hundred shares on my birthday a year ago, and I've already had two evening frocks out of butterscotch."

She laughed and Jean laughed with her; but Mrs. Haley, uncomfortably aware of their hostess's silence, tried in vain to attract her daughter-in-law's attention.

"My husband says Mr. Roger is making money fast; and he roared when I said he just looked a good-natured country cousin in his late twenties. He says he's forty! Quite elderly, you know; but it's nice in these days to see a business man who doesn't seem to be carrying the world on his shoulders. We're to have a shooting-party in the autumn—I suppose you know he's a crack

shot?—so I'm to make the acquaintance of his wife this week."

"You'll like her; she's sweet," said Jean.

Mrs. Mallinson glanced at Edie and this time saw the displeasure that was written large on her face. It was reflected on the face of Mrs. Haley, and she became aware that she had somehow made a *faux pas*. Inwardly amused, she allowed enthusiasm to die down in her voice as she rose and said,

"What a fortunate woman you are, Mrs. Laycock! Such dear children! It has been *so* nice to see you again."

They kissed—it was mostly air that their lips touched—and as the Florence moved smoothly and magnificently along the drive Peggy Mallinson smiled to herself.

"Not *very* fortunate, I imagine, after all," she murmured.

Edie was as nearly depressed as she ever allowed herself to be when her guests were gone. She dismissed the child to his nurse and went indoors, remaining in her dressing-room until the sound of wheels on the drive told her that James was returning. During dinner she was silent and her husband's air of moodiness added to her dejection. He did not appear to notice that she replied to his observations in monosyllables; and with the strange contrariety which most of us perhaps experience in similar circumstances, having begun by devoutly hoping that he would not notice her unresponsiveness she ended by almost entertaining a grievance against him for his want of sympathy. Some natures would have found relief in tears but Edie's was not of that order.

They withdrew to the drawing-room. James invariably dressed for dinner, though his father had disliked the ceremony and bother of it, and only one or two of his neighbours indulged the custom. With Edie no other course was thinkable; she would as soon have thought of appearing at dinner in her dressing-gown as in her afternoon frock. It was what her

people and her people's people had always done:—what everybody did except barbarians and "hands"—as essential a household ritual as the morning bath. James was bondservant to his wife's traditions; but a willing bondservant.

He sat down in his own chair and stretched out his legs. It was stuffy indoors even with one of the French windows open; James hated draughts—lurking-places for chills and death; he therefore rang for a servant and bade her close it. His tone was peremptory and the maid frowned as she left the room—he was unpopular at home as he was disliked at the mill. At one time he had smoked, but had long ago abandoned the habit as an extravagance; though he pressed expensive cigars upon his guests with the persistence of a man who hates stint. Evening visitors, however, were a rarity, for he had no friends who just "popped in," and he himself went nowhere uninvited.

Edie, languidly occupied with coloured silks and a half-completed altar-cloth, looked across at him from time to time, but his moodiness repelled speech. In similar circumstances Rosie would have rallied her husband and either driven the clouds away or emptied them in a thunderburst. Mary would have sought to share the burden. Edie simply watched her husband's face; not unsympathetic, yet not tenderly solicitous. She had something to say herself, but was content to wait for an opening, and by and by it came.

James looked up and caught his wife's inquiring eyes before she could avert them.

"Low-spirited?" she asked. "Things been going wrong at the mill?"

"Things are always going wrong," he said—not irritably: he had schooled himself too well for that; but gloomily; "man is born to trouble, Edie, as the sparks fly upwards. I've finished with George. Everything is signed, sealed and delivered."

"Well," replied Edie, "it's what you've wanted for a long time. He has been a thorn in your side ever since your father died; what is there to worry about?

You're surely not wasting any sentiment over a man who struck you?"

"He has struck me again, and more deeply," said James. "I have bought freedom, it is true, but with a great price. This dissolution has cost me ten thousand pounds more than I had reckoned on. The accountants and lawyers were favourable to me and saw the thing from my point of view; but George had one adviser who upset my calculations and has wrought me a cruel injustice."

Edie raised her eyebrows. "It was not unnatural to seek legal advice on his own account, I suppose?" she said.

"It was extremely unnatural to seek it where he did," James replied; "—from one who has always been our enemy: from a half-brother against a brother. It is a true word that a man's foes are they of his own household."

"I don't understand," said Edie. "Why does the law allow a cruel injustice, and how does it happen that Roger can work it?"

"We had practically agreed upon a figure," James replied. "George was apparently satisfied, and the thing would have gone through if his wife had not persuaded him to let Roger look into the accounts. That impertinent interference upset all my calculations."

His wife looked at him steadily, and was for once unmoved by his disconsolate tone.

"Even yet I don't understand," she said. "One is always hearing of Roger's successes; and of his acumen and far-sightedness; yet you have invariably told me that he was a fool, and that George was of the same opinion."

"So he is a fool!" was the sullen answer.

He would not look at her though he knew that her eyes were on his face. It was humiliating to have to make these admissions to his wife, and he knew that admissions would have to be made: that the time had come when he could hoodwink her no longer. He was uneasy in the silence that followed his unconvincing

assertion, knowing that his wife was suspicious and even unsympathetic.

"For a fool he seems to have done very well," she said, with an inflection of sarcasm to which he was unaccustomed, and which astonished herself, "judging by accepted standards. A man who can do well for himself and well for other people, and who incidentally can outwit the astute senior partner of the great firm of Wainwrights wouldn't ordinarily be accounted a fool. Do you think so?"

Having nothing to say for the moment, he took refuge behind his features, which assumed an aggrieved and hurt expression. He prided himself that he never quarrelled with people, however great the provocation given and received. It was unchristian and ungentlemanly, and there was an art in quarrelling which some men acquired to the discomfiture of honest opponents and their own unmerited advantage. There had never been anything approaching a quarrel between him and Edie, not even a tiff, for when their wills had occasionally clashed, he had had the grace to yield, the fact being that he was always in subjection to his wife's lineage and afraid that the strain of vulgarity that was in him might peep out. Edie's superior social position strengthened and gilded his own, and on that account Edie was to be humoured and honoured. On the present occasion he sensed danger, felt in his spirit the tingle of approaching conflict, and therefore remained silent.

Edie did not smile, even sarcastically. In the days of their courtship she had rather liked the smooth-tongued young man, whose evangelical attitude harmonised with her own, and even yet she was fond of him. Their tastes were similar; even in their failings they were alike.

The love of money was present with both, and the love of hoarding. Each thought it sinful in the lower orders to love it: to covet what God in His wisdom had not bestowed on them; and Edie was just as determined as James that the lower orders they con-

trolled should have no opportunities to hoard. But Edie was more sincere than her husband. She sincerely believed that it was God's good pleasure that the poor should be always with us: that the lower orders should be content to remain in the condition God had made for them; and because Roger was obviously of the lower orders, seeing that his mother had been a broad-spoken, common "hand," and he himself was little better, Edie felt there was something wrong with a Providence that set such a man on his feet, and made him a prince of industry, and a pattern for other business men to imitate. That is why she turned for explanations to her husband, who had grievously deceived himself as well as her by dubbing this degenerate half-brother a fool.

James's expression of misery mollified her, however, as it was intended to do. It was a weapon that men like George knew to be sham and turned against him; but with Edie it was a sword whose edge never became blunt. She was sorry for her husband when he looked so woe-begone, yet she was not disposed to drop the subject. Her voice was kindlier as she proceeded, and James felt that with careful management the crisis might be passed in safety.

"You never told me that Roger was chairman of the Florence concern, and that the Beebee business could run four huge warehouses. You must have known what everybody else seems to know, that his is the brain that directs all these big businesses, yet you've never ceased to sneer at him as a fool. 'The Idle Young Ruler'—you and George have called him! Is it that you've been deceived yourself? Haven't you known until this affair of George's has enlightened you that the man is anything but a fool?"

"He *is* a fool, Edie!" James spoke ingratiatingly, deferentially, with a certain proud humility that sought to cover his mistaken judgments. "I erred in my opinion that he was without business ability. It must have been latent in him, for there is no denying that he has prospered. My father was a man of great

discernment, and no doubt realised that in the furnace of affliction some of the dross in Roger's character might be burnt out. But, although I have been deceived in him, he remains a fool. The furnace has produced gold, but as the Wise Man says, 'though thou shouldst bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him.' Roger remains a fool!"

Edie was not impressed by these vague generalities.

"A fool who prospers by his folly and whose praise seems to be in everybody's mouth; a fool who is credited with making a song of life, and who is apparently happy and contented, might be envied by many a wise man," she remarked. "You must read me this riddle, James. I have no skill in riddles."

"I have a confession to make, Edie," he replied. His eyes were fixed on the carpet, and he spoke hesitatingly, as if the words were forced from him by an honest inward compulsion. "I have not wanted to deceive you, but I have kept the truth from you partly because I feared it would be unwelcome, but also because it reflected upon my own judgment, and was mortifying to my pride. Month after month I waited for news of Roger's downfall. The story of each fresh enterprise confirmed me in the conviction that such fast riding must result in a fall. In the case of ninety-nine men out of a hundred it would have done, and what reason had I to suppose that Roger was the hundredth—a fellow who worked, and who still works, if report speaks truly, with his hands in his pockets? A fellow who had always been able to find time to fish and shoot and go to cricket-matches? I have lived in expectation of a crash, and it hasn't come. Very slowly I have become convinced that it isn't coming."

Edie was busy with her needles again, but he knew he had her attention, and he knew that this frank confession—frank, yet at the same time an affectation—had disarmed her.

"Roger has touched nothing that has not prospered.

That butterscotch business is nothing less than an El Dorado. The car factory is another—there isn't a car on the market to touch the Florence, and they turn out nothing under a thousand guineas. Even the mill has never had a loom standing through all the slack period. The man has coined money—he's a modern Midas; but though I was wrong in the particular, I was right in the general—Roger's a fool!"

Edie did not even raise her eyes, and he went on—

"Roger ought to have been a very rich man by now, but the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. He'll have a few thousands, of course, but they tell me he gives his shares away as fast as he gets them to people who can never be a strength to the concern, and it's common knowledge that his mill is run on most unbusiness-like lines—sharing profits with his hands, and consulting with them about trivial details that any master who wasn't a fool would determine for himself."

"And that isn't customary, I suppose?" inquired Edie, who never concerned herself with business affairs. Even her home was controlled by a housekeeper.

"Customary! My dear girl, a master must be master, or the result will be chaos. Nobody at Wainwright's has ever been consulted about management except the heads of departments, and the heads are not allowed to forget that they've a master. *You* don't consult your maids; you give your orders."

Edie agreed. All this was too reasonable to be disputed; and in her eyes to question the correctness of what was well-established was to commit an act of treason against law and order.

"Then why does he do these mad things?" she inquired.

"Because he's a fool! There's no other answer. Look at the life they lead in that miserable house next door to an inn. He could live in a house like this if he would. Little wonder that his hands address him by his Christian name."

Edie was shocked. For one moment she wondered

what would happen to the world if a maid should ever address her as "Edie"; but the thought was too ridiculous and inconceivable to be dwelt upon.

"He must be a fool," she said, "and a trial, one would think, to his wife."

James brightened. "My dear, his wife aids and abets him. She is a woman of the people, without ambition—a spiritless creature, full of Quakerish whims; just the sort of woman to lead a fool like Roger by the nose. Such women, brought up in a narrow environment, throw away the good things the gods give them, and never know the joy of possession."

Edie was tired of the subject. "*Chacun à son métier*," she said, with uplifted eyebrows, and silence fell between them again.

All the same, very similar thoughts were passing through the minds of both. "The joy of possession!" How much joy did James get out of life? He was wealthy: had already more money than he knew what to do with, and was adding to the pile every year; yet he was always envious of other men's prosperity; always secretly chagrined when other men were honoured; always reaching out after the "something more and better." It was not so with Edie. She was contented enough, and in a quiet way happy. If she saved, it was because she saw no sense in spending money on things that brought no return. If she skimped in the servants' quarters, it was because expenditure on what would not be seen was a form of extravagance—mere waste. Yet this "joy of possession" of which James spoke had never exhilarated her, and was not in evidence in him.

"I wonder if they are less happy than we are?" she said suddenly, giving voice to her thoughts.

James did not need to ask whom she meant.

"How can they be happy?" he replied gloomily.

CHAPTER XIII

IN WHICH ROGER IS THREATENED WITH A STRIKE

ROGER folded his arms upon the tall desk that stood beneath the window of his office, and looked into the street with eyes that saw nothing. The shadow of a cloud was on his face, and his lips were tightly closed. Mary was ailing again. Up to now her frequent breakdowns had provided the only real anxieties he had been called upon to carry, and the present trouble was no more serious than others. All the same, it worried him now, as it invariably did, for trifling ailments did not always remain trifling, and the world without Mary would not be worth living in. Roger had been married seven years, and was more in love with his wife than ever.

There was another ailing body, however, that deepened the cloud shadow. For some time things had been going awry at the mill, and Roger realised that the moment had come for dealing with the matter. It vexed and troubled him to know that there was discontent among his younger workpeople, and he searched his conscience to discover how far he was responsible for it, and when he had satisfied himself, he turned resolutely to a consideration of the remedy.

He remained in deep thought for nearly half-an-hour, and then went into the inner office, where Walter Freeman was busy with his day-book.

"Tell Steve I want him, will you?—and leave us to ourselves a while," he said.

Walter slipped from his stool, and looked anxiously into his master's face.

"Don't fret, lad! I'm worried; but the end o' the world hasn't come yet. Just see that nobody disturbs us."

"I shall have to put my foot down, Uncle," said Roger, when Stephen came in. "If this sickness in the mill is to be stopped, there's going to have to be a bit o' surgeon's work done."

"If that means 'at you're going to sack Ted Freeman," said Stephen, "you'll be cutting t' sore spot out 'at all wer trouble comes from. He spreads mischief same as measles, does Ted. He's getten ower big to be a man and wants to be maister, and all 'at caps me is that the others'll hearken to sich a bletherheead."

"He knows his job," said Roger, "but he's one o' them bags that are too full o' wind to carry corn. He knows quite well that we can't give 'em what he wants —shorter hours and all the rest of it—so long as other folks don't; but any sort of a stick 'll do to stir up mischief, and Ted thinks he's born to be a leader. We'll have him in."

"I tell you what I'd do if I was i' your place," said his uncle. "We could do with a bigger mill, for we can't cope wi' t' business here. There's yon place o' Holroyds down i' Silton standing empty. If they come out at Ted Freeman's bidding I'd shift t' business out o' t' dale altogether."

"Would you? Well, I'm going to cut the sore spot out and give the body a chance to mend! It'll heal soon enough, you'll see. I don't want a bigger mill, Uncle. I'm neither short o' brass nor work, and Lonedale suits me all right. You'll none see me running away from Ted Freeman."

"Well, all I say is 'at when we're pulled out o' t' place wi' orders——" began Stephen; but Roger interrupted him.

"Let 'em go on pulling! It says in the Bible that

he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow; and it's the same wi' mills. What orders we can't take there's other folks can; and when I've as much on my plate as I can eat, I don't fill my pockets. Bring Ted in, Uncle."

Stephen did as he was told, and the man entered with a defiant air and sat down without being invited. "You're wanting me, then?" he asked.

"That's where you're mistaken, Ted," Roger replied. "I'm *not* wanting you. You've been thrusting your chest out this last year or two same as if you thought you were cock o' this walk; and as I gave you fair warning a month since and warning makes no difference; and as a lot o' your mates seem to be getting smittled by you, I'll make shift to get on without you. You can either stop at the week end or go now—it's all one to me."

"If I'm sacked, I'll bring t' lot out," said Ted. "You'll happen tell me what I'm sacked for."

"I will," said Roger. "You're sacked for being a plague-spot—a breeder o' mischief. You've upset the council and the whole mill with your daft proposals; and you're neither doing your whack yourself nor letting other folk do theirs. I'm cutting you out, same as a surgeon would if there was something festering in a man's body; and you've nobody to blame but yourself. It's what you've been asking for, and I've had a lot o' patience; but now you're getting it."

"Then I'll bring 'em all out," Ted repeated.

"Very good. The buzzer 'll bring 'em in again," Roger replied calmly.

"Not if it doesn't bring me with 'em, it won't," said Ted fiercely. "There's some things you can't do, Roger."

"That's so," Roger admitted cordially. "I can't turn a mule into a man, but I can get rid of it when I'm stalled of it kicking. Now there's no more to be said. You finish here on Saturday, my lad; strike or no strike."

He banished the cloud from his brow altogether

as he walked home, and when Mary met him in the little hall, he held her for a moment at arm's length before he kissed her.

"Nay, lass," he said; "you get younger and bonnier every year! Don't you know we're old wed folk, and it's time the crows' feet were beginning to show? Why, you shame the lasses who haven't put their hair up; I'm blest if you don't!"

"You've distorted vision," replied Mary. "It's time you had a day on the moor with your gun."

"Roger knows that flattery sits in the parlour when plain dealing is shown the door," said Mercy, who was setting the dishes on the table. "There's more crows' feet on her forehead than I care to see."

Mary smiled. "Don't worry, Mercy," she said. "I'm better now—much better. The pain in my head has nearly gone."

All the same, she had no appetite, and Roger made her sit by the fire and drink a cup of tea whilst Mercy attended to his wants. She obeyed with a laughing protest, and insisted on knowing what had occurred at the mill.

"So there'll happen be plenty o' time for shooting," said Roger, as he concluded the narrative.

"Our people are too sensible to be led astray by Ted Freeman," said Mary.

"I'm not so sure," returned Roger. "It's surprising how a bit of a sore boil can upset all the body; but once we get rid o' the boil, we shall mend fast, I fancy."

"'The way of a fool is right in his own eyes,'" said Mercy, "and Ted Freeman has never been aught but an empty knowledge-box, with a deal more sound than sense in his noddle. He must always be at the head of things, must Ted."

"Aye," replied Roger, "but there's only one head at Laycock's, Mercy, and it rides on my neck. You've none of you any need to worry. I've reckoned things up, and I know where I stand. Parson said last Sunday that it was when Jeshurun waxed fat that he started

kicking, and there are some down yonder who've been overfed. They're asking for a spell of low diet, and they'll get it."

"Yes," said Mercy grimly; "it's as old Solomon says: 'A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back.' *I* shan't worry; don't you fear!"

"It will be a big trouble for Walter," said Mary. "I'm awfully sorry for him—and all of them."

"Well, now, lass o' mine," Roger replied. "you needn't fret two minutes over any of 'em. I've thought this thing well out, and you'll see that Walter 'll have naught to grumble about in the long run. He's too good for aught I can give him as long as Uncle Steve lives, but I've a plan in my head that I think 'll work."

Mary smiled. "I won't fret," she said. "I am so sure of you."

He bent over her and kissed her. "Really better, lass?" he asked anxiously.

"Ever so much," she said.

When he returned to the mill, Mary bade Mercy bring her hat and coat. "Fresh air is what I need," she said; "fresh air and sunshine. A short walk will do me a world of good."

"It's over far for you to go," Mercy replied. "It's more than you've strength for."

"Can I *never* hoodwink you, Mercy?" Mary asked, with laughter in her eyes.

"I wasn't born yesterday," was all Mercy replied.

Very slowly Mary walked up the road to the Freeman's home at the top of the village. It was only a small cottage, that was entered direct from the road like its neighbours, but it had always an air of greater prosperity. Ted saw that paint was not spared on its exterior, and his wife saw that it was kept clean. The steps were always well scoured and edged with sand-coloured lines; a brilliantly-polished brass door-knob took the place of the customary "sneck"; and short curtains, spotlessly white, covered the lower part

of each window. No house in the Fold was better cared for.

Mary knocked and entered without ceremony, and a heavily-built but active woman came forward to greet her.

"Eh, Mary!" she said; "but you're fair spent! Walter said you hadn't been so well again. Come and sit you down, and I'll get you a drop o' cherry-brandy. Ted always keeps a bottle for Susan."

Mary protested, but Mrs. Freeman was apparently deaf, though by no means dumb.

"There, now! That'll do you good, you'll see! I said to Susan 'I shouldn't wonder if we was to see Mary up this afternoon, forgetting 'at you was badly. I didn't ought to be calling you Mary, either, in that free fashion, when you're master's wife, and lots o' brass in your pocket; but it sort o' slips out afore I fairly know what I'm saying."

"Then are we no longer the good friends we have always been?" Mary asked. "Why should money make a difference?"

"I don't know, but it always does, someway," replied Mrs. Freeman. "There's naught separates folks like brass. It's separated Ted an' me."

"Gold doesn't make men into gods," replied Mary. "It's an evil thing and a snare when it fills us with self-love and false pride; when it hardens our hearts and lifts us above our fellow-men. You and I will always be Hannah and Mary to each other, I hope."

Mrs. Freeman brightened. "I shan't have to twist my tongue to call you Mary," she said; "and I shan't respect you no less, neither. But what you say about money is gospel truth, as *I* know to my sorrow. We're a lot better off than we was i' Joe Holmes's time—a lot better off, we are—but it's been naught but an evil thing and a snare to Ted, for he grumbles and growls worse by half nor he ever did afore. The more he has the more he natters!"

"But it will have eased your burdens a little," Mary suggested.

"It's done naught o' t' sort! He doesn't give me a ha'penny piece more. 'You managed nicely afore,' he says, 'so what do you want wi' any more?' Not a red cent have I got out of all his bonuses and what not; though right enough he buys bits o' things to please himself. That chair is his, and t' gramophone; but my purse is no heavier, and I've no more on my back. And I wouldn't care if he wasn't always muttering and threatening till our Walter says he'll shift into digs. We're both of us fair stalled!"

"He will have told you what happened this morning?" Mary asked.

"Aye, he was full of it. You'd ha' thought Roger had given him a five-pun' note he was that pleased with himself. 'He got it straight from t' shoulder from me!' he said. 'I told him straight 'at if I was sacked t' engine 'ud stop while we got wer own way!'

"'You're ower well done to,' I says, 'down yonder. You aren't satisfied wi' your share o' t' cake, but want t' lot. I don't wonder you've been sacked,' I says; 'anybody but Roger 'ud ha' done it long since.' But he only sniggered and said: 'You'll see!' Walter was that mad, I thought they'd be using their fists, and Susan cried."

"Poor Susan!" said Mary sympathetically.

"Don't worry about her," Mrs. Freeman continued, "Walter 'll see she wants for naught, and for t' matter o' that Ted has plenty put by, I'll warrant; and if he hadn't, he'd pinch a bit for Susan. He isn't all bad; and his heart's as soft as his head where she comes in."

"No man is all bad," said Mary. "Roger rather likes Ted in many ways. He says he knows his job thoroughly and can work well when he's a mind. But he's set out to master Roger, and Roger won't be mastered. He wanted me to tell you, though, that we shan't let Susan go short."

"I'm sure you wouldn't," returned the other gratefully; "but if you'll be ruled by me, you'll none be

in too big a hurry to send a basket up. Let Ted worry a bit—it'll do him good. He can't thrive without worry, and since Roger took hold, he's had a grudge against him 'cos he's left folks wi' naught to worry about; and now he goes about telling t' tale that this profit-sharing is a fly dodge to keep folks quiet—throwing a pinch o' gold-dust in their eyes to blind 'em. 'You may well say that,' I says. 'There's no profit-sharing i' this house: you know a trick worth two o' that. Us women 'll have to strike,' I says, 'and see if *we* can't get a few pinches o' gold dust thrown at us!'"

"Walter must be a comfort to you," said Mary encouragingly.

"He is that; but he'll be getting wed after a bit I reckon; and Susan 'll be leaving me, too. There isn't much to look forward to."

"Let us go and see Susan," said Mary, with ready tact.

She was lying in the little room at the back—a tiny apartment that seemed uncomfortably crowded, though it held nothing but a light iron bed, a small table, and a couple of chairs. The bed was placed close to the wall beneath the window, so that Susan could look upon the fields that reached up to the moors and watch the clouds and the stars. Except in the stormiest weather the window-sash was raised to its full extent, and robins and sparrows—even an occasional starling—had the freedom of Susan's city, and would hop upon the counterpane for the crumbs she flung them, and were not afraid to peck from her hand. A bowl of flowers from a neighbour's garden glorified the round, unpolished table.

Susan was twenty, but her thin, worn face misrepresented her years and gave her an elderly look, which was intensified by deep lines of suffering on her forehead and the extreme pallor of her complexion. Her thick, black hair was grey, almost white, above the temples.

Her eyes brightened when she saw Mary. "Oh,

yes, I'm better to-day," she said, in answer to her visitor's inquiry.

"She's always better, but never mends," commented her mother, with that lack of reserve so characteristic of many West Riding women.

"Don't croak, Mother," said Susan. She smiled at Mary, who had bent down to kiss her forehead. "She's never forgotten 'at they called her Crow before she was married," she added.

A wan smile passed over Mrs. Freeman's face. "She keeps up wonderful," she remarked. "I oft say she's all t' bit o' sunshine we get i' this house. Walter sleeps here, and that's as much as you can say; and as for dad, when it's fair weather there's always a storm coming up."

"And with mother it's dull; threatening rain," laughed Susan. "Then when t' storm breaks, there's strong breezes, and I hear 'em in here."

"It's wonderful what a sperit she has," sighed Mrs. Freeman.

There came a knock on the street door at that moment, and the mother left the room, whereupon Susan turned her large expressive eyes on her visitor and said:

"I'm sorry dad has been making trouble again down at t' mill. I hope it isn't that 'at's made you poorly?"

Mary smiled. "No. I'm often ailing, Susan, but I try not to worry, and I usually succeed. It's you and your father I'm troubled about. Your father has blown his trumpet so long and loudly that I believe he really thinks the mill walls will fall down if he is sent away."

"And he *is* sacked this time, isn't he?" Susan asked anxiously.

Mary sat down and took one of the wasted hands in hers. She did not attempt to prevaricate, for she understood the nature of the girl, and she replied:

"Yes, and Roger won't take him back. You see, your father is making this a test of strength, and he thinks he is stronger than Roger, and can make him

comply with his demands. They are very foolish demands, and your father must know it, but he is hot-headed and won't listen to reason."

"No," said Susan; "naught 'll shift him once he sets himself. He talks to me when he can't to the others, because they've no patience to listen to him. He says there didn't ought to be masters and servants when one man's as good as another, and that the mill ought to be same as a Co-op."

"And what do you say?" Mary asked.

"Very often I don't say anything," she replied. "I don't seem to have strength to argue; and, you know, what he says sometimes sounds right enough only it doesn't seem to work out. He says there didn't ought to be masters, but, my word, *he's* master here; neither mother nor Walter have any say at all. And he's says he'll let 'em see who's t' master down at t' mill. I can't reckon it up myself."

"Don't let it trouble you overmuch," said Mary. "Roger won't do anything unjust, and he'll do what he can for you all. This disturbance troubles him, because he really has wanted to deal fairly and generously with everybody; and your father knows that there isn't another mill where the workpeople are better treated. But he won't make Roger his enemy, and I don't want you to fret and make yourself ill."

The girl smiled and pressed her visitor's hand.

"You're real good to me," she said. "I don't seem as if I'm letting it bother me. I was just reading my Bible when you came in where it says, 'Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature,' and a bit further on it says that our Heavenly Father knoweth what we've need of. So I'm leaving it there."

Mary bent and kissed her, and a smile spread over the wan face.

"I said to dad just before he left this dinner-time, 'Aren't we all servants, dad? The King is servant to the State, and the Prime Minister is servant of the

King, and it says in the Bible that Jesus was among men as one that serveth.'"

"Yes," said Mary, "and the head serves the hands just as much as the hands serve the head. Be of good courage, Susan! It will work out all right, you'll see."

"Maybe I won't see," said Susan; "not from down here, anyway."

Then she brightened. "That was just a bit o' glumness," she said. "I'm better than I was; I am really."

Mary kissed her again, and left.

CHAPTER XIV

IN WHICH THE STRIKE BEGINS AND ENDS

FROM the window of her bedroom Mary could see all that was taking place in the roadway and could hear the greater part of Ted Freeman's impassioned harangue. The crowd that had gathered to hear him was composed mostly of men, but there was a sprinkling of women and young people, and it was evident that the speaker was not having matters all his own way, though the purport of many of the comments could be gathered only from the answers they provoked. Ted was angry—a sure sign that all was not going well.

"T' Union? Who cares a hang whether t' Union backs us up or it doesn't? We're wer own Union here!"

"What have we come out for?" a woman's shrill voice inquired; and the crowd applauded.

"We shall get wer strike-pay off Ted," another said. "I'm goin' up for mine when t' meetin' lowses."

Ted's answer was lost in the roar of laughter that greeted this sally, but Mary caught a few isolated words and knew that the man was aware he was defeated.

At that moment Roger walked up and the crowd made way for him, evidently expecting that he was about to address them. He had had no such intention, but he was quick to recognise his opportunity.

"They seem stalled o' you, Ted," he remarked playfully. "Let me fiddle 'em a tune!"

He climbed on to the cart and waved his hand to his wife with a cheerful gesture.

"It's our wedding-day," he explained; "and you've given us a holiday this year for which we aren't as grateful as we happen ought to be.

"Now then!" He paused and looked in their faces inquiringly. "I was just in time to hear one of you ask what you're out for. Ted can't tell you because he's over modest, but I'll tell you. It's because you've let him mesmerize you with his daft talk. What Ted wants is six Sundays and one working-day in every week, and he's willing to work that one day for naught if you'll pay him for all the Sundays.

"Now the Vicar wants me to patch it up and give Ted another chance; but I've given him chances till I'm stalled, and he's finished at my mill, so you can all make your minds up. Ted means to be boss—you may take no notice of him when he says he doesn't believe in bosses: it's the one thing he does believe in. Now, I'm no fool, if I look one, and I know where I stand. I'm as fast for you to work for me as long as I run a mill as you are for somebody to find you work. But there's got to be a head on the body and it's fastened to my neck and not to Ted Freeman's. Ted thinks he's got a patent for running a body without a head; and I think Ted is just a big blain that's making the whole body sore. Now you can't work properly with a blain on you so you've come out for a rest; but I've cut the blain out and now 'at you've had three days to think about it the buzzer'll go as usual to-morrow morning, and those who come back'll be made welcome. And, mind you, Roger Laycock will still be head; and if a head that hasn't a body fastened to it isn't worth much, it's worth just as much as a body that's short of a head. We'll keep the body healthy if we can. I'm captain of the team; but I'll play a straight game, and I'll play all I know for my side—and that's you folks. Now Ted, if you want to fiddle your tune out I've finished."

He got down and went indoors; but the crowd was

in no mood for further speeches and gradually dispersed.

Mary smiled when he entered the dining-room.

"You're winning, Roger," she said.

"Nay, lass," he replied; "I've won. They'll come in to-morrow."

"*I'm* here, uncle Roger!" said a child's voice from beneath the table. "I was hiding. It's my birthday!"

Roger's face became one huge smile. "Well, Miss Eleanor," he began; "if you haven't nearly made me jump out of my skin——!"

"I'm not Miss Eleanor," she said as she came forward and pushed him into his easy chair. "I'm Nell!"

She seated herself on his knees, and he took her head between his hands and pretended to look searchingly into her face.

"Dear me! so you are," he replied. "I must be getting short-sighted. You see it's Eleanor's birthday, and I was just going to wish her many happy returns, and see if there wasn't a sovereign somewhere about. Good job you corrected me, because Nell hasn't a birthday."

"She has! And aunt Mary has given me a lovely box to hold my handkerchiefs—a *beautiful* box—and your sovereign was in it. And I love you ever so much."

"Not as much as Eleanor does," said Roger. "She'd have given me a bigger hug than that."

"No, she wouldn't," replied Nell with an emphatic shake of her curls. "Only uncle James and aunt Edie call me Eleanor, and I don't hug them. I *hate* Eleanor!"

She made an emphatic gesture which caused Roger to laugh. "You're stamping!" he said.

"I *will* stamp, if you call me Eleanor," she answered.

She climbed up on to the arm of the deep easy chair, and putting her arm round her uncle's neck drew down his head on to her shoulder. "I love you and aunt Mary better than anyone else in all the world," she said; "and I wish *you* many happy returns too."

She hugged him until he cried out, protesting that he was being choked, but she only slowly relaxed her hold, and then slid down on to his knee again.

She was strikingly beautiful, and yet in some strange way, not immediately attractive. Her features were almost perfect, and she had glorious hair, of a richer brown than her mother's, and very abundant. She had her father's grace and easy carriage, shapely legs that would have served as models for a sculptor, and arms and hands to match. She was quite unconscious of her beauty; quite self-possessed in any company. It was her eyes that repelled strangers—hardly repelled, perhaps; that checked their enthusiasm, one might say. They were quick, penetrating eyes, often hard, though capable of the softest gleams of pure affection, but with no sign of laughter in them. They were too grave for her years; they seemed to have seen too much and yet too little; they were too *knowing*, as if experiences had been gained which should have been withheld from a child.

"You must love mother and father best, dear," her aunt remonstrated.

The child looked at her with wide, contemplative eyes.

"I love mummie this much," she said, extending her arms and bringing her hands within a couple of inches of each other. "I love Nannie this much"—she drew the hands a little farther apart—"except when she's cross and snappy, and then I don't love her at all." She again shifted the position of her hands until a distance of a foot separated them. "That's how much I love daddy," she explained; and then, outstretching her arms to their widest extent, she continued gravely, "and this is how much I love you and uncle Roger."

Tears came into Mary's eyes, but Roger laughed.

"And how much do you love aunt Edie and uncle Jim?" he asked; and Nell closed her lips tightly.

"For shame, Roger!" said Mary. "I'm glad the child rebuked you."

There was a cake with icing on it, but only Nell was really interested, though the others nibbled a little in honour of the occasion. No industrial storm-cloud was allowed to cast its shadow on Roger's face, and Mary's quiet spirit remained unruffled when she saw how cheerfully her husband spoke to the child and with what heartiness he disposed of the meal.

Whilst Mercy was removing the cloth, Nell went and stood before the picture and looked solemnly into the eyes that were so sad and wistful. With pendant arms and clasped hands she let her gaze rest upon the face and was silent. She had stood thus many a time before and Roger watched her, waiting for the words that would follow when she turned away. By and by they came, but not until Roger bantered her.

"You're frightened of him, Nell!"

"I'm not," she returned stoutly, "but I don't like him. Daddie looks like that sometimes when mummie has made him cross. Mummie often makes him cross, and sometimes I think he's going to cry, and some other times he says naughty words."

"Hush, dear!" said Mary; "little girls must not tell tales about their parents even to uncles and aunties. Come, put on your hat. Mummie will be worrying about you."

Nell shook her head—"Not mummie," she said, "but Nannie will, perhaps."

The Vicar looked in for a moment as Nell left, and wasted no time in formal greetings. "Any message for Ted?" he inquired. "I'm on my way to see Susan. They say she's very poorly—upset, no doubt, by that fool-father of hers."

"Cheer her up!" replied Roger. "Tell her she can trust me, and there's nothing to worry about."

"We usually have to tell them to trust in the Lord, and leave it at that," said the Vicar; "but I daresay it'll relieve her mind to know she can trust you as well. What's going to happen to-morrow?"

"The looms'll be running to-morrow," Roger answered confidently; "but Ted and a few of his

mighty men'll be missing numbers. There'll be no difficulty in replacing them."

" ' Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us,' " the Vicar said bluntly.

" I'll forgive him," Roger replied ; " but he's finished with Roger Laycock and Company. He doesn't come back to the mill if he covers himself with sackcloth and ashes."

The Vicar looked at him steadily but said nothing.

" Nay," said Roger, " it isn't stupidity : it's principle. I have it all weighed up."

" Then I'll bid you good-evening and good luck," replied the Vicar. " I'll let Susan have your message."

* * * * * * *

" Well, lad, how's your father taking it ? " Roger asked Walter Freeman the next afternoon. Everything was in full swing again, and Roger had had a busy morning making the necessary adjustments in consultation with Stephen.

The young man bent down his head. " Badly," he replied. " There 'll be no living with him if he carries on as he is doing. I've had just about enough. He says he'll raise Cain in the place. He'll make naught but trouble as long as I'm here. It isn't that I blame you or have aught against you."

" Then you don't owe me a grudge, like, for sacking your father ? "

" Owe you a grudge ? I wouldn't have a man like that working for me if I'd to shut the shop up. I—— "

" Steady, lad ! " Roger broke in. " Don't be in too big a hurry for fear you say what you'll have to unsay after a while. He's your father, bear in mind, and you can't chuck him on to the midden same as I've done.

" Now look you here ! You've been turning this thing over in your mind and so have I : but I've been turning it over for months past. There's naught bothered me as much since I took over from Joe Holmes. You think you'd better leave, do you ? Well, so do I."

Walter looked gloomy and kept his eyes on his boots.

"I'll tell you something I heard when I was a lad," Roger went on, "and it'll be a parable. You wouldn't know old Dr. Crawley—he was before your time. He was a queer old sort, but a rattling good doctor, with a practice that grew so big he couldn't grapple with it. And my dad asked him one day why he didn't take a partner, or an assistant or two—'Dr. Norwood,' he said, 'has three, and rakes brass in.'

"The old doctor just looked over the top of his specs and said 'I've both as much brass and as much worry as I want, Mr. Sam. There's lots of young doctors waiting for jobs, and if one wants to start here I shan't stand in his way. I sup my porridge from a plate, sir, not from a bucket!' My dad called him an old fool; but that's how Dr. Herbert came on the ground."

Walter looked up and saw a smile on his master's face.

"I say that's a parable, Walter. I'm of the same mind as Dr. Crawley. You know without me telling you what orders we have offered. If we'd a place as big as Wainwrights' I believe we could keep every loom running. Now most folks would either take a second mill or flit to a bigger; but I'm like the old doctor—I'm content to sup my porridge from a plate."

Walter bent his brow, and it was plain that he did not read the meaning of the parable.

"I'm coming to it," said Roger, answering the interrogation on the other's face. "You'll have heard, I daresay, that yon small place of Simpson's at Carr Bottom is to let. How would it be now if you were to take it and start for yourself? Nay, I didn't mean that sort of a start!"

Roger laughed, for the young man's face showed absolute incredulity and amazement.

"How could *I* start for myself?" he asked.

"That's where your dad'll come in," Roger replied. "He'll have a bit put away, though naught like enough to run a business. But what you're short, I'll find. I did think once over of renting the place and putting you in to manage it, but this is a better scheme, be-

cause it'll give you a chance to get on your feet. What orders we can't take I can turn over to you, and what brass I lend you can be paid back bit by bit."

Walter's lip trembled. "I'm very grateful, Mr. Roger," he said; "but I'd a deal sooner manage a place for you than start on my own. I can't thank you enough for your offer, but it would frighten me to think I was running the risk of losing your money——"

"There isn't going to be any risk," Roger interposed. "Till you'd paid me back I should have my eye on the business, but when you'd cleared me out it 'ud be yours, do you see? Nay, lad, I've schemed it all out and there's naught to be afraid of. But think it over, lad; think it over. You've served me well; and a lad who's played well in t' first eleven is fit to be made captain o' t' second."

"It takes my breath," said Walter dubiously; "and how dad'll look at it I don't know."

"Your dad's the weak spot in the scheme," said Roger, "and that's a fact. It isn't that I doubt he'll work well enough; but a bad servant nearly always makes a bad master. I've heard say that the oppressed slave makes the worst sort o' taskmaster, and I doubt your dad'll be hard on his hands if he isn't watched. What I should like to be sure of is that you'll watch him."

"But if he puts money in he'll be top dog," said Walter, with rising colour. "What bit I've saved——"

"Is ear-marked for house-furnishing," laughed Roger. "I've thought of all that, lad. Well, now, you can please yourself about your father's brass; but you know he *is* your father, and you mustn't leave him on the scrap-heap. I fancy between us we can fix it up. Think it over, lad; but I'd say naught to anybody—not even your dad—till we've gone into it again."

CHAPTER XV

IN WHICH GEORGE PUTS HIS FOOT DOWN

THE last of the guests had gone, but the sound of his hooter could still be heard when James returned to the drawing-room and sat down heavily in his easy chair on the hearth. "Thank goodness that's over!" he said wearily.

Edie just glanced at him. She had enjoyed the dinner party and was pluming herself on its success. Everything had gone well. Cook and waitresses had done their work excellently, and Lady Fairmont had whispered in her ear that she envied her her staff and her gift of management. The praise had been the more gratifying because it was unearned—she had not and had never had any gift for management whatever; but she had thought it unnecessary to explain that she had a priceless housekeeper, a woman who had once been a lady until "a bank or something" broke and left her penniless. Edie believed firmly in a providence which wrought good for her out of the evil that had befallen other folk; and if the wage she paid was low it was as much as a woman with no previous experience could expect, and Edie had not the tiniest qualm of conscience about it. Why should she have when the person made no complaint and seemed to take pleasure in her work? Her efficient arrangements gave Edie a great deal of unacknowledged comfort.

No expense had been spared on this occasion, for the principal guest, Sir Harold, was a personage in the political world—a man whose influence counted for something. The others did not matter much—they had been invited to meet the lion and to advertise the meeting—but Sir Harold and his lady mattered a good deal. And Sir Harold had enjoyed his dinner and had extolled the wines—why, therefore, should James be glad that it was over?

"I've been in a tight waistcoat all the time," he said, speaking in metaphor that for once was not scriptural. "You've to tread warily with a man like Sir Harold. He doesn't need telling that any man who does him rather well is wanting something, and he weighs him up to see how much he'll be worth to the party funds. If anything comes of it it'll cost me thousands—thousands!"

The explanation ended on a note of deep depression, and Edie looked impatient.

"If you don't want anything from him why invite him here?" she inquired impassively. "I thought you had an idea it might be worth while."

"But think of the price," he replied. "He's dropped a hint or two. It isn't one thousand they're after—it's ten, twenty: heaven only knows how much."

Edie was still unmoved. "You must determine whether or no it's worth it," she said. "I don't quite know what you're after, but if it will pay you to give them twenty give it."

He said nothing and she changed the conversation.

"Turner asked if you would be able to spare him ten minutes this evening," she remarked. "He wants you to raise his wages. He says that with his increasing family and only twenty-two shillings a week he can't make ends meet."

"Then he must find someone who'll give him more," said James irritably. "Gardeners are plentiful enough, and the man gets a cottage and his coal What has he to grumble at?"

"I'm sure I don't know," she replied languidly.

"Very likely it's what George calls a 'try-on.' But twenty-two shillings certainly doesn't seem much, and he really is a first-rate gardener with a wonderful knowledge of vines and orchids."

"A man's wages are governed by the law of supply and demand," James replied. "You may tell him I'll give him twenty-five but he needn't look for more. *I* won't see him—I should lose my temper with him if I did. He was glad enough to come for twenty, and he's already had one rise. What do they want with so many babies?"

"My dear, you can't expect me to ask him that," she replied.

"Speaking of George," he went on in a vexed tone; "what mad scheme do you think he's got on now? You'd never guess! They're going on a continental trip—indeed, he did hint that it might extend to a tour round the world—starting in a fortnight. That's Rosie again! He admitted it."

Edie had no desire to go round the world, but she would have liked to spend the winter months in the Riviera if James had been able to leave his business, but he had declared that this was quite impossible. Holidays always seemed impossible with James. The reflection that it was so easily possible in George's case gave her a sense of dissatisfaction and she said—

"Money is evidently plentiful with George. When a man does no work he is at any rate free to enjoy himself within his limits. They surely are not taking the child with them?"

"The child! Do you think Rosie would hamper herself with any child? They are proposing to leave her with Roger and his wife."

If the suggestion had been that she should be sent to the local workhouse he could scarcely have brought more disgust into his voice.

"She's rather young for a boarding-school, or that would have been the best way out of the difficulty," said Edie. "I'm not attracted to the child—she's

a most perverse little creature—but I'm sorry she must go to those people."

"Edie, she mustn't. *Noblesse oblige.* I told George she must come here."

Edie raised her eyebrows but made no other protest.

"You've seen George, then?"

"I ran across him in Broadbeck. I'm rather sorry for the poor beggar. He's got through half his money, he tells me, and can't afford the trip, but Rosie's mind is made up and they'll have to go. After this he says he shall put his foot down, but he has Reuben's failing —he is unstable as water. I am troubled about George. I sometimes fear he will bring disgrace on the family, and it was that consideration that made me protest when he said Eleanor was to go to Roger. We must try to save the child."

"From what?" she asked.

"From vulgarity," he replied. "She is our niece, Edie."

"I shall raise no objections to her coming," said Edie; "but I'm not at all sure that life will go smoothly. The boys don't like her; they hate her grave, grown-up airs and sharp tongue. I foresee trouble, but I suppose it can't be helped."

"The children must learn to carry their small crosses, and to bear with those who grieve them," returned James piously. "I am glad, my dear, that you don't disapprove my action."

"You mustn't expect me to be enthusiastic," said Edie.

Rosie was furious when George told her that he had consented to send the child to Carr Hall, but to her surprise she found her husband immovable.

"I've told Jim they can have her, and have her they shall," he repeated stubbornly.

"And I've promised Mary she shall go to them, and I won't break my promise," said Rosie.

"Very well then, we'll stay at home and that will settle it," he said. "If we go, Nell goes to Jim and Edie, so that's all there is to it."

She stormed; but with decreasing vehemence as she watched his face and saw him stiffen. It had been hard work persuading him to agree to the trip, and she was not going to jeopardise her own pleasure for the child's happiness, though she well knew what volcanic protests the new arrangement would call forth.

George could not explain even to himself this sudden change of attitude without acknowledging that the estrangement from his brother had troubled him, which he had always emphatically denied. That Jim was a sanctimonius humbug and his wife a "stuck-up aristocrat" he had affirmed to Rosie a thousand times since the dissolution of the partnership, and it had been easy to follow his wife's lead and entertain more cordial feelings towards Roger and Mary.

There could be no question that Roger had his head screwed on the right way. All that talk about the "idle young ruler" had been nonsense, though Jim would not admit it. Jim, however, had been outwitted when the partnership was dissolved, and it was Roger who outwitted him—George could not deny that. Roger was prepared to be friendly, and his advice was remarkably sound and was offered without priggishness. He had never been anything but brotherly, yet there was something about the fellow he could not stomach. Roger laughed at him—made him feel a fool, an incompetent; thought and said that all the wrong hadn't been on Jim's side; affirmed that Jim "had his points" and that Edie probably wasn't so bad if you knew her properly. Roger didn't sympathise as he might have done. Mary was better—yes, Mary was very affectionate, and understood a fellow's feelings, and was awfully good to the kid and a true friend to Rosie. Mary was worth a hundred Edies.

But "pride, the never-failing vice of fools" could not brook the thought of the sneering comment that would pass from lip to lip of the idle crowd that concerns itself with other people's business—"He's had to send the kid to his despised brother, Roger, after

all, you see! 'Any port in a storm!'" This offer of Jim's would spare him that humiliation!

No consideration of what Nell herself would wish either weighed with or troubled him; and it was Rosie, who was always professing that the child was a little nuisance, who now worried herself with the certainty that her daughter would be miserable.

"Nonsense!" said George impatiently; "she'll cry her eyes out till she goes to sleep, and wake up as right as a bobbin."

"She won't cry at all," said Rosie. "You don't know her, though she thinks twice as much of you as she does of me. She'll *rave*, and she'll be too utterly wretched for words, but she won't cry. You've never seen her cry."

"I have," said George.

"When?"

"When her Aunt Mary scalded herself and fainted. Nell thought she was dead, and cried like the very deuce. And when Mary came round the kid hugged her and sobbed as if her heart would break!"

"The silly kid!" said Rosie; with a fleeting sensation of jealousy that she would have hated her husband to suspect. "She'll not sob on Edie's neck, I warrant."

"I hadn't courage to tell her, my dear," Rosie explained to Mary a little later. "I'm not ordinarily a coward, and there's nothing I wouldn't tell George, and I should just *love* to take a disagreeable message to Jim and Edie, but I couldn't face the kid with the news that she had to go to hell for a few months whilst her father and mother were enjoying themselves in heaven."

"I couldn't enjoy myself in heaven if my child was in hell," said Mary pointedly.

"Of course you couldn't, my dear puritan sister-in-law; but my heart's the size of a nut and not a bit softer. All the same I couldn't face the kid, as I say, and I told Nannie she'd have to do it. 'And put a bit of gilt on it,' I said. 'Tell her what a lovely time you'll both have, and how nice it will be to have four

cousins to play with.' And Nannie said, 'Very good ma'am' and looked as if she'd like to slay me."

Mary's eyes were moist. She was cruelly disappointed; but the tears that she restrained were not for herself but for the child she loved—for the child who loved her. Rosie saw them but made herself blind.

"Nell came to me herself. She was as white as paper and her lips were trembling; but she isn't as soft as her Aunt Mary, and there wasn't a sign of tears; I was more nervous than she was, I believe. I'm afraid of that kid, Mary. She walked slowly up to where I was sitting, with her big eyes staring straight into mine, and said—

"'Mother, I won't go to uncle Jim's.' She's always called me 'mummie,' but she said 'mother' this time.

"'Of course you will,' I said; 'daddy has arranged it, and you'll be all right there. We can't have all we want in this world,' I explained; for really she might have been seventeen instead of seven. 'Don't stare so, child!' I went on; 'you look wild! Just try to be reasonable.'

"She didn't speak for quite a minute—anyhow it seemed a minute; and then she said:

"'I want to go to uncle Roger.'

"'I wish to goodness you were going to your uncle Roger,' I said; 'but your daddy says you are to go to Uncle Jim, so you may as well make up your mind'; and I told her to run away and be a good girl, and we'd bring her heaps of wonderful presents when we came home.

"Do you know she stood there as if she were turned to stone, and never took her eyes away from mine. I wanted to shake her and slap her, but it would have been like shaking an old woman, and after a while she said:

"'If you make me go to uncle Jim's you'll never see me again—never!' and with that she just turned and walked out of the room."

"Oh, Rosie!" said Mary; and now the tears overbrimmed and trickled down her cheeks.

"Ah, well," said Rosie, "I felt like that for a minute or two. She sounded like one of the witches in 'Macbeth,' and it made little icy shivers run down my spine. The child isn't normal: there's a screw loose somewhere; but she's going to be a very handsome woman, I can see that. If she wasn't deficient in humour she'd make a top-hole actress."

"But what do you think she meant when she said you'd never see her again?" Mary asked, still greatly troubled.

"I suppose she thought she'd frighten me," replied Rosie. "She's an awfully cute little beggar, and no doubt imagined I should go away with visions of my child floating on the surface of the pond in the park. But I wasn't built on sentimental lines, and it was a damp squib, my dear. Temper, I call it, and if you aren't a silly goose you'll dry those tears and laugh at her for a clever little monkey."

"Rosie, how can you!" exclaimed Mary indignantly.

"Because I'm honest Injun," laughed Rosie. "I put all my goods in the window, as I've told you before. I nearly became an actress myself, only my talent sank into my feet instead of rising to my head; and then Jim is a beautiful actor—quite a star in his own line. So you see, my dear, its in the family on both sides, and though I'm interested and impressed for the moment, it all fizzles out when the curtain drops and the footlights are switched off. It was cleverly done and almost brilliant for a child, but I'm not likely to be off my food on that account, I assure you."

"Rosie," said Mary earnestly; "if she is *very* unhappy at Carr Hall—if she won't settle—can't you persuade George to leave word that she must come here."

"My dear Quakeress, so far as I'm concerned you can have her with pleasure. I wish she was yours instead of mine—I'm not kidding; I really do: I'd

make a deed of gift, or whatever they call it, this afternoon if I could. I don't know why I was allowed to be a mother, and why you weren't—it's some mistake, I suppose, on the part of the authorities. I would have been a real nice auntie to her, but alas——! I'm vexed with George for sending her there, and we've had a desperate row about it; but I can't move him. I'll tell him what she says, and what you say, and that's as far as I can go."

"Don't go abroad!" pleaded Mary. "It's ridiculous, of course, but I've a presentiment of trouble. Put it off a year."

"You demure, superstitious, grey mouse!" replied Rosie as she wound an arm about the other's waist. "I thought good Christians didn't believe in omens and that sort of rubbish, but put their trust in the Lord and kept smiling. I'm not such a heathen after all, I find."

Mary drew the laughing face to hers and kissed it.

"Don't go, Rosie; please!" she said.

Rosie released herself and pressed Mary's arm affectionately. "If I stay any longer you'll be making me promise, and then I shall be a lot more sorry for myself than I am for the kid. By-bye!"

She blew Mary another laughing kiss and was gone.

"I'm troubled about them, Mercy," said Mary when she went into the kitchen. "I do wish they weren't going."

"That's what comes of being at a loose end," Mercy replied. "Idle folks are always wanting holidays; but it's as old Solomon says—'As a bird that wandereth from her nest so is a man that wandereth from his place.' But when a man has a cuckoo in his nest——!"

"Now, Mercy!" said Mary.

CHAPTER XVI

IN WHICH VARIOUS PEOPLE HAVE THEIR ANXIETIES RELIEVED

AUTUMN ! Frost in the air ; decay and death abroad in the fields and hedgerows and destroying the shelter of the woods ; rusted heaps of bracken, rusted sheets of ling on the multi-coloured moors ; littered leaves in the trim gardens of suburban dwellings ; the golden glow of evening soon after noon ; the warning of winter's approach in the curled and spotted leaves that cling desperately to the trees on the drive.

Betty Binns felt oncoming winter in her bones. She rose from her chair with some difficulty, and for the twentieth time within an hour walked over to the window, where a very trim, good-looking maid was standing, screened by a lace curtain. It was the maid's trimness and good looks that had commended her to Sam, who was less concerned that she should be an efficient housemaid than that she should be conspicuous in the graces that guests admire in those who serve them. As it happened, she was not lacking in either quality, and had a nice disposition to boot, which showed itself in an almost daughter-like devotion to her mistress.

Despite her youth and good looks, few people would have found her the more attractive of the two as Betty and she stood together and looked down the drive. Rheumatism had stiffened Betty's joints but not

crippled her, and once out of her chair she got along nicely and gave nobody any reason to suppose that the machinery was breaking. She made the most of her height, and moved with a natural effortless dignity that filled Sam with pride. Her white hair was no longer concealed by a cap, but was coiled neatly at the back of her head, forming a crown of glory to the sweet face that was as pleasant and placid as in the old days at Carr Bottom.

Those days were not forgotten. The soft silk gown she was wearing reminded her of Roger's prediction, and she never wore it without smiling (a little sadly) as she recalled the incident, for though she was contented in Sam's content and very proud of his success, she was not as happy as she had been in the tiny cottage. Life had been full then, and the hours had sped pleasantly and quickly. They dragged a little now, sometimes, when there were two other women in the house, and not nearly enough work to keep three going. But it was Sam's will and pleasure that it should be so, and his law was Betty's delight.

It was a circular drive in front of the windows of the house, and a grass-bordered central bed of large bushes and small trees shut out the view of the straight portion (the "pan-handle," as Roger termed it) that led to the entrance gate; the view was, therefore, restricted.

"I like to see folk passing," said Betty. "It makes a bit of company and gets the time on. There's nothing to see here."

"I wish we could see that car," said the practical Jennie. "You can't keep a meal warm and nice when folk are an hour late, and Margaret'll be that cross there'll be no living with her. I'll bet master's car has broke down again."

"I've been thinking the same, Jennie," said Betty.

"They say he got too much for his money," said Jennie, with the frankness that her mistress encouraged rather than checked; "but that would be just like master. Mr. Roger wouldn't; but then he doesn't

go in for a car of his own. It seems so funny when he's all that money, and runs a place for making 'em, that he should stick to a horse and trap, or else let master have to fetch him."

"He'll maybe be getting one before so long," replied Betty; "but Mr. Roger was never one who cared for show, and you see he likes horses. Isn't that their horn?"

"Sounds like it," replied Jennie; "yes, here they are!" and she beat a hasty retreat to the kitchen to warn the cook.

Betty opened the door herself to receive her guests.

"Nay, Mary," she said, "whatever's happened to you? We've had tea ready—dinner, I ought to say—a full hour. I should have worried, I daresay, if I hadn't known that Sam's car turns sulky now and then."

Mary's explanation was drowned in Roger's more robust interposition:

"Don't you blame Sam's Pullman, Betty," he said, as he bent down to give her a hearty kiss. "The old rattlesnake has come along grandly, and we've never had to shove once. Sam's so hot with pride that he'll warm any cold dinner; and Mary and I are in such a cold sweat that any sort of a dinner'll taste hot."

Betty smiled. She had already led the way into the drawing-room where Mary silenced her husband, and proceeded with her apology.

"It was not Sam's fault, Betty, and it was not exactly ours. The fact is, Nell was lost, and we were very much troubled about her."

"Nell?" Betty inquired.

"George's child, you know. She is with Jim and Edie; and a very troublesome, rebellious guest they find her, I'm afraid. She has been there nearly two months now, and won't settle—scarcely eats anything, and just says yes or no when she has to answer questions. She is a peculiar child—very strong-willed and obstinate, but a very loving little soul for all that."

Roger had not remained in the room, but had gone round to see that Sam did not loiter over the process of stabling the car.

" Just before Sam arrived a man came over on horseback from Carr Hall to inquire if Nell was with us. She had not come home to lunch, and nobody had seen her in the grounds or in the house. The man said Edie was in a great state about it, as the nurse had told her that the child was always threatening to do something desperate."

The gong sounded at that moment, and the two men appeared at the door. Mary's explanation had perforce to be cut short.

" Roger found her eventually, but it made a long delay and caused us to be very late. I'm awfully sorry."

Betty squeezed the arm that was passed through her own, and nothing further was said on the subject.

Roger was unusually silent for a time, but when Jennie finally withdrew he roused himself and made merry at Sam's expense.

" I tell you what, Mary," he said to his wife ; " you and me'll have to go to school to Sam and Betty, or else send Mercy down for a month's training. Sam's the man for showing us how to do it. I'll bet if we hadn't been coming, he'd have been in his evening togs ; now, wouldn't you, Sam ? "

Sam's red face supplied the answer, and Roger winked at Mary and went on with his meal.

" You're short o' finger-glasses, Sam," he remarked later. " Just make a note of it, Mary, 'at we send 'em a set for a Christmas present. Wainwrights always used 'em, and no real gentleman's table is complete without 'em. I've enjoyed my dinner, but I'd a sort o' feeling that there was something lacking."

Betty's eyes stopped him. It was not annoyance that he read there, but it was certainly appeal ; and with a laughing " All right, Betty ; I'll put the stopper in," he refrained from further pleasantries at his host's expense.

Sam was an irresistible target, however, and Roger

broke out again when they were all seated in the drawing-room. His eyes travelled round the walls, lingering on the subdued tints of the Wilton carpet and the tastefully-chosen furniture, and he said :

" Beats Carr Bottom, this, I reckon, Sam ; and Dacre Villas, too. How long do you figure it out *this*'ll satisfy you ? Lots o' folk would call this a full stop—' a desirable family residence, situated in its own grounds, conveniently situated for business and pleasure '—but I dare bet in another year or two you'll be either buying a hall or building one."

Betty looked across anxiously. " A hall ! " she said in a troubled voice. " Oh, Sam, I hope not. This is plenty big enough for us—too big ! How you manage it out of butterscotch, I don't know ; but if you want anything bigger and finer, you'll have to find a wife to manage it, and let me go into some snug little home of my own, where there'll be nothing to worry about."

" I've no thought of changing, Mother," remarked Sam awkwardly, " and Roger knows it. He's kidding."

" Nay," said Roger, " I've been a true prophet so far. I saw that silk dress your mother's wearing, and those evening duds that you're ashamed to put on, as far back as that first afternoon when I said I'd lend you some brass. And I saw this desirable residence and that Pullman of yours long before you did ; and now I look on a bit further and I see a fellow with a starched front that's butler to Samuel Binns, Esq., J.P., Binnsborough Manor, Keeley."

" Roger ! " said Mary, " don't be silly ! "

Sam was not altogether displeased, but a memory had been aroused by his friend's badinage, and he said :

" By the way, Roger, have you seen this afternoon's *Post ?* They've made your brother James a J.P."

" Is that so ? " replied Roger. " Well, Jim'll have grace enough to carry a cross of that sort without groaning ; and I don't doubt but what he'll give the poor prisoners that come before him some rare good advice. I could like to see him to-night. He'll be

carrying his pride with proper humility, same as a high collar that nearly chokes him."

"I hope he'll be kind to poor Nell," said Mary, with a sigh. "I was telling Betty that you found her on the moor. I can't think how you came to guess she was there."

"I've a good nose," said Roger lightly. "It 'ud have made me my fortune if I'd been a nuisance-inspector."

"But you've made your fortune already, love," said Betty; "and other people's fortunes, too. Look at Sam and me. I oft enough wonder when Margaret and Jennie are calling me 'ma'am' if it's just a dream and I shall wake up in my little bedroom at Carr Bottom."

She sighed—regretfully, one might have thought—but immediately brightened, and Roger laughed.

"You aren't a bit better off, Betty, with all your brass," he said. "I believe you wish you were making butterscotch in a saucepan yet."

"I'm not complaining," she replied with an affectionate glance at her son. "What pleases Sam pleases me; but it was nice to see the children bring their ha'pennies, and to have a neighbour pop in for an odd minute and tell the news, to say nothing of being on the roadside and seeing all that went on. But this is very nice, too," she went on apologetically, "and for Sam's sake I shouldn't like to go back."

"We all understand," said Mary in her gentlest voice.

"I'm sure you and Roger do," Betty replied, with a smile, "for you're content to remain as you began, for all you've made so much money. There's lots of things money can't buy, and one of them is a contented mind. It isn't oft but what you find that much wants more."

"But some folk get more whether they want it or no, Betty," said Roger. "Brass breeds in the night-time. Why, bless your life, I lent a fellow at Blackpool a few thousands, less than a year since. He'd some

property mortgaged, and he couldn't find the brass when they called their money in. He says to me, 'It'll be wanted for street improvements before so long, and if you help me out we'll share profits'; and I'm hanged if I haven't made a heap o' brass out o' that job."

"You've the luck, Roger," said Sam.

"I've a good nose," laughed his friend.

"You've a better heart!" said Betty.

"Nay," replied Roger. "'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth,' Betty; and I've had precious little chastening beyond what I get from Mary and Mercy."

"Hush!" said Mary uneasily. "'Let not him that girdeth on his armour boast himself as he that putteth it off!'"

"Nay, lass," replied Roger, soberly. "God forbid that I should boast. I reckon I'm grateful 'at I've escaped so far."

The railway helped them over part of the homeward journey, and they walked the rest of the way, for there were stars overhead and the moon was rising in an orange vapour above the hills. The road was steep and long, but not too steep for those who were not pressed for time, and not too long for those who were lovers still. As the moon climbed, it silvered the landscape and sparkled on the waters of the noisy brook. Save for this insistent voice, there was a great silence around them, and they could speak in subdued tones.

"I couldn't tell you before how I found her, Mary," said Roger.

They had not been speaking of Nell, but each knew that the other's thoughts had been full of the child and her escapade.

"I was leaving the park when a woman stepped from behind some bushes and beckoned me to her. It was Turner's wife—Jim's head gardener, you know; a decent, nice-spoken woman who looked at me with frightened eyes, and said: 'Oh, sir, I daren't let them

know at the Hall, but Miss Nell will have followed our Tom, as sure as you and me are standing here.'

"' Tom is your lad, isn't he ? ' I said ; and she said ' Yes, sir ; he's fourteen years old, is Tom, and Miss Nell has taken a fancy to him because he paints a bit. He'll be up on the moor now with his paint-box, and I dare be bound Miss Nell will be with him. If the master hears of it, he'll send us away for sure."

"' Well, don't let him hear of it, then,' I said. ' You can trust me. *I'll* see Miss Nell and your Tom.'

" She told me where she thought they'd be, and there I found 'em. He's a bit ambitious, that lad is—a delicate sort o' youngster that looks as if he'd do with feeding up : big, brown eyes and fingers like a woman's. He'd a piece o' paper on a drawing-board happen half as big again as a sheet o' foolscap, and, by gum, he'd got the moor on it sure enough. Not that I know a good picture from a bad 'un, but I told him I'd stand a sov. for it when he'd finished it.

" And Nell was there all right, as demure a piece o' goods as you could find in all Yorkshire. She'd eaten most o' the lad's dinner, and left him naught for his tea ; and when I played the deuce, he said : ' I'm afraid we never thought that people would be uneasy, Mr. Laycock ' ; and Miss Demure looked me in the face and said : ' Tom didn't know I was following him, and he tried to make me go back, but I wouldn't. And he *did* know they'd be uneasy, and I said I didn't care if they were, and I don't. I wish they were so uneasy that they'd have a fit and send me away.'

" So I told her to put the lid on ; and when I'd warned the lad to keep his clapper still, I brought young madam away. There was no need to warn *her*—she'll be as close as death. ' What'll you say when you go back ? ' I asked her.

"' Nothing ! ' she said, and, by gum, I believe her ! "

" What are we to do, Roger ? " asked Mary wistfully.

" Do ? " he replied. " Nothing ! We'll see what providence makes of it."

CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH NELL RUNS AWAY

WINTER brought all its rigours with it that year. November was blustering but mild, and people were beginning to talk of a "green Christmas," when December opened with a warm sun and skies as blue as any that April brings. "Weather breeders," the farmers on the uplands asserted with slow shaking of heads, but the Lowlanders laughed at them. "All sorts o' weather, an' all bad, wi' farmers," they said.

Then came a change. Hard, biting frosts, with snow crystals thinly dotted over the landscape, and the promise of snow in the leaden clouds that crept up out of the North and conquered the blue. After this, hail and lightning, with an occasional rumble of thunder. The next day, and for several days, showers of icy sleet, driven by furious gales, to be followed suddenly by crisp frost again. On Christmas Day itself rain fell torrentially, but on Boxing Day the villagers woke to find their world hidden beneath a thick white counterpane, with snow still falling fast.

It was a poor Christmas for most folk. Influenza had claimed hundreds of victims, and many of Roger's workpeople spent the festive season in bed, or in arm-chairs on the hearth. Roger's household had escaped the scourge, and he and Mary and Mercy went every-

where, dispensing Christmas cheer both material and spiritual.

"It's a good job trade slackened down a bit, uncle Steve," Roger observed one day when he had called to see the old man, who was one of the victims. "If we have to sup our gruel now and then, it's as well to have it when things are quiet."

"I fear I'm at t' far end," said Stephen. "It's much if I ever see t' inside o' t' mill again."

"You're at the far end o' the 'flu," replied his nephew confidently. "Another day or two, and you'll have felled that warp and feel as fit as a fiddle. Come, cheer up! The wood's in the tree yet that'll make you your coffin!"

He did not tell him how many coffins had been made; that Susan Freeman had gone, with several others who had been apparently strong and hearty when December came in. Nor did he mention that James had lost his youngest boy, his baby just over three years old.

"A happy New Year, uncle!" he went on, as he rose to leave. "Most of your years have been happy, I fancy. Isn't that so, Aunt Jane?"

"There's been little to grum'le at as far as I know," she replied; "but most men isn't happy if they aren't grum'lin, so there you are. He's doin' as nicely as you could wish, is your uncle; but every time I bring t' tray in he sees t' coffin-board behind it."

The landscape was still cosily tucked in its thick, white coverlet when New Year's Day came round, but the sun shone brightly and the sky was almost free from clouds. The air was bracingly cold, and the well-mufflered musicians who visited Lonedale to encourage the inhabitants with the belated strains of "Hail, Smiling Morn!" had much ado to attend to their blue noses when their even bluer fingers were so busily engaged with frosty instruments.

Roger had invited them into the kitchen, where Mercy revived them with hot tea, and made disparaging comments when the master of the house tried each

instrument in turn, producing such a din that Mary was fain to appear at length and beg him to have pity. They had all laughed heartily and gone away in high good humour after giving, "just one more, lads!" several times. Then Mary and Roger sat down to tea in the dining-room.

"I daresay they wouldn't be reckoned a Hallé orchestra," remarked Roger, "but when fellows do their best, I'm ready to be pleased; and a word o' praise, when they see it's meant, counts for more than a half-crown sometimes."

"*You* did your best," said Mary; "but I'm afraid *I* wasn't ready to be pleased. But you never blow your own trumpet, so I won't complain if you blow other people's now and again."

Roger laughed, and would have replied if Mercy had not brought in a letter that had just been delivered.

"Vancouver," said Mary. "It will be from Rosie."

It was scarcely a letter; just a greeting card with a few words scrawled on the back:

> "Having a rattling time and spending heaps of money. George as cheerful as an empty grate. Hope the kid is all right—never hear from her! Love to the grey mouse and the rat.
>
> "ROSIE.
>
> "N.B.—Shall spend Xmas at Montreal—Palace Hotel."

Mary passed it across to Roger, who read it and tossed it back. "They'll soon be back now, I should think," he said. "They must have cut a good bit out of the programme to be in Canada by now."

Mary's eyes were anxious—Roger could see that, even though the shaded lamp on the table obscured his view somewhat.

"I'm troubled about Nell," she said. "I wish the child was with us, especially when there's so much sickness about."

They little knew how near she was! At that moment Nell's hand was on the gate and her eyes were fixed

hungrily on the warm scene beyond the still uncurtained window. She was excited and spent with running, and without waiting to be admitted, she opened the door, banged it behind her, and whilst Mercy came running to see what had happened, burst into the dining-room and almost fell into Mary's arms.

"I'm poorly," she stammered, "and I've—I've run away."

After that she was so still that they all thought she had fainted, but when Mary tried to lay her on the couch, the child clasped her neck tightly.

"No, no," she said; "on your knee, auntie."

Mary sat down before the fire, and Mercy poured some hot tea into a saucer and held it to the child's lips. "The dear lamb's full of fever," she said, and Nell glanced at her and closed her eyes.

"I've had 'flu," she said wearily.

Roger telephoned for Dr. Herbert, and then rang up Carr Hall, and inquired for Nell. Edie answered the call, and replied with polite coldness that the child had had a touch of 'flu, but was now convalescent, and was sitting by her own wish alone in her bedroom. Nannie had a half-day's leave. There was no cause for anxiety—none at all. She was sorry they had not informed him, but the attack had been a mild one; and their own loss——

"Yes, yes," said Roger, instantly softened; "Mary and I are awfully sorry, but I must tell you that Nell is *here*—with us."

"Eleanor is with you!" Edie evidently did not believe she had heard correctly.

Roger explained. "We're getting her to bed, and have 'phoned for Dr. Herbert. There was naught else for it, you see."

"I—I must speak to James," came the bewildered reply. "Will you wait?"

"Nay," said Roger; "he can ring up if there's aught he wants to know."

James walked over instead. The distance was not great—a short two miles—and he got there before

the doctor left. The task was distasteful, but, as it overlaid a duty, he could not shirk it. He had always avoided Lonedale since Roger set up business there, and though he had once or twice visited his brother George at Gapstone, he had never descended the hill to the village. If he had not known that Roger's house adjoined the inn, he would have been under the disagreeable necessity of having to inquire his way thither.

He could hardly have gone wrong, however, for the doctor's car was standing at the gate, and the chauffeur recognised him and touched his hat. Dr. Herbert himself was in the little hall with Roger, when Mercy admitted him. The faces of both men were grave.

"Oh, how d'you do?" said the doctor. "I'm glad you've come. We had perhaps better step in here."

He pushed open the door of the dining-room, where the table had not been cleared. The fire and the silk shade of the lamp diffused a dull red glow which gave a warm and cheerful look to the room, and James got an impression of extreme cosiness. There was something there that was wanting in the stately apartments at the hall—something good and desirable. Vaguely he wondered what it was.

All the time his ears were taking in the doctor's observations, and no one would have suspected that his attention was divided. "Pneumonia?" Dear me, he hoped not. Pneumonia had carried off Geoffrey in spite of the care and skill that had been bestowed upon him. Whilst his grave eyes, fixed attentively on the doctor, spoke of anxiety and sorrow, and his lips murmured an occasional expression of dismay, his mind was asking why George's child should be spared when his had been taken? Why punishment should not follow perverseness? Why the ungrateful runaway should not pay the extreme penalty of ingratitude? If she had to die, let it be at Roger's house, and not his. Let Roger convey the news and bear the responsibility.

His intellect awoke to the doctor's question:

"Why the devil did the child run away?"

It was a casual, a curious, rather than a searching inquiry, but James read into it suspicion and reproach. What had Roger and his wife been saying to poison the man's mind and arouse misgivings? He shook his head mournfully.

"I cannot say. My wife cannot say. One of those unfortunate aberrations, I suppose, that sometimes accompany convalescence, and arise, no doubt, from depression."

"That's right enough," said the doctor; "but the child is only seven, and oughtn't to have depressions deep enough to drive her out of a warm room into the snow. She hasn't ailed much—what imp of mischief put this wild notion into her head?" James stole a glance at Roger, but dropped his eyes when he saw how steadily he was being watched.

"As my brother's only child," he said, "every care has been lavished on her, but I fear she has missed her parents more than we have realised. She is not a normal child, as you must have seen for yourself. She is old for her years, self-willed, and at times uncontrollable. Her nature seems entirely devoid of affection, and the company of other children is abhorrent to her. She has made my wife and me both anxious and unhappy; but we have striven to do our duty by her."

"No doubt of that," said the doctor. "Anyone could see she had every comfort at the Hall; and why she should make tracks for another shelter, I can't understand."

"Well, now, I'll tell you," said Roger. "There's no question about her having been well done to at James's, and if she hasn't been happy there, it's mostly her own fault, I'll be bound. She's a queer little thing, is Nell, but she's always taken a fancy to her Aunt Mary, and fancies are things you've got to reckon with, especially when kids are ill. She wanted to come here when her father and mother went away. but

James had the first claim, and they sent her there. Most youngsters would have settled down in a week and had a good time, but Nell takes a leaf out o' nobody's book. She's a pot o' one, is Nell, and can set both her feet and her jaw like a mule that'll neither be driven nor pulled. It was just a mad whim to see her aunt Mary that sent her here, I'll warrant, and the poor little lass seems likely to pay dear for it; but now that she is here, she'd better stop."

"Better stop!" ejaculated the doctor. "What else can she do? In all probability she'll die as it is, but there's no ghost of a chance for her if she's moved. You'd better send her nurse down, Mr. Laycock," he said, turning to James. "Trained nurses can't be got for love or money just now, but she's in good hands here. Ring me up," he said to Roger, "if there's any change, and I'll be round as soon as I can; and, in any case, I'll be here early to-morrow."

"I'll go with you, Herbert," said James. He turned as he spoke, and his eyes rested on the picture. Involuntarily he started, for in the small, dimly-lit room it seemed to him that his own face had been transferred to the canvas; and the young ruler, straining his eyes to pierce the darkness, was no longer a painted effigy, but a living soul; a silent auditor and spectator; sentient, admonitory.

The doctor saw the change on the other's face, and wheeled round to ascertain what had produced it.

"By gad, you've a fine picture there, but a bit creepy, isn't it? What's it supposed to represent?" He bent low to read the inscription: "'The Rich Young Ruler'—em! One of Tempest's, I see. Worth a few hundreds, I guess?"

"A few thousands wouldn't buy it," replied Roger, with a sly glance at James. "It's worth more than sixty-five thousand pounds at this minute—to me."

"Sixty-fi—?" The doctor stared at Roger, and did not trouble to complete the ejaculation. "Come, Mr. Laycock," he said, "we'll be moving, if you're ready."

Mercy came in and cleared the table, but she did not speak to Roger, whose head was buried in his hands. He had not realised until now how dear the child upstairs was to him ; what a blank her death would leave in his life. It was the same, he knew, with Mary. They had not grieved when no children were born to them, for with Mary it was just God's will, and therefore good ; and in these matters Roger followed his wife's lead. But Nell's love had been very grateful to both, and Roger smiled bitterly at the recollection of what James had said : "Her nature seems entirely devoid of affection!" Seems! James had never seen the soft cheeks pressed against an aunt's face : he had never felt the tight clasp of soft arms on his own neck : he had never heard the quiet and yet passionate declaration · "I love you two better than anything in the whole world!"

And now she was going to leave them—"almost certainly," the doctor had said ; and he was a clever man, and one who did not speak lightly. What a blow it would be to Mary, whose nature, he told himself, was more loving than his own! She would be very brave, but she would fret terribly, though she would try to hide her trouble for his sake.

After a while he shook off these thoughts. Why should the child die? She was strong—both George and Rosie were strong as horses—she would be certain to have an excellent constitution ; of course she would not die. Mary was a skilful nurse, and would fight death without flinching. So would Mercy. So, he was convinced, would Nannie. So would he. They would have other advice—Sir Henry Thompson from Airlee. Why had he not thought of that before? Confound it! He would ring the doctor up now. Cost? He could afford a thousand visits from Sir Henry, or anybody else! The child's life must be saved—that was all that mattered ; and she would stay with them, and make their sunny home still sunnier by her presence.

The telephone bell rang. "That you, Roger?

James speaking. Edie and I have been talking things over. We are very sorry you should be put to all this inconvenience, but we trust God in His mercy will spare the child ; and in that case we shall welcome her home as soon as the doctor gives permission for her to be moved. You will quite understand that it would be unpleasant for us if people were to imagine that we had given her cause to leave us—— Are you there ? Are you there ? "

Roger was not there. He had hung up the receiver and returned to the dining-room, where he raised the shutter of his roll-top desk, and took up a sheet of paper, on which he proceeded to write :—

" Reply paid.

" Laycock, Palace Hotel, Montreal.

" Nell seriously ill at my home. May she remain here until you return ? Very important.

" ROGER."

Then he rang up Sam Binns, and dictated the cable to him. " Get it through at once," he said.

Twelve hours later the reply came :—

" News very disturbing. Cable further particulars. Keep Nell until I come.

" GEORGE."

CHAPTER XVIII

IN WHICH THERE IS DARKNESS—AND DAWN

ROGER, returning home from the mill somewhat later than usual, was accosted at the gate by a small boy whom the darkness prevented him from recognising.

"Come inside, lad, and let's have a look at you," he said in answer to the timid inquiry how Miss Nell was getting on. "It's what I'm wanting to know myself."

The lad hesitated, but Roger took him by the arm and released him only when they stood in the dimly-lit hall. "This way," he said, as he opened the dining-room door where the cloth was laid for tea and a fire burned in the spacious grate.

He turned up the lamp, but at first could not put a name to the features that seemed familiar.

"Tom Turner! So it is. Well, Tom, your nose is blue and you looked as pinched as a starved rat. How long have you been hanging about outside screwing up courage enough to call?"

The white face reddened at the question, but there was nothing to be afraid of in the kindly eyes that were bent upon him, and he replied:

"I didn't see any lights downstairs, sir; and I didn't like to bring anyone from the bedroom."

He did not explain that on four successive nights he had walked across from his home at the Hall lodge, and gazed up at the window where shadowy forms were

sometimes thrown upon the blind; heedless, indeed unconscious, of the discomforts of biting winds and driving snow, and had returned home anxious and unsatisfied. This was the fifth night, and only the accident of Roger's late home-coming had made it different from the rest.

"You shall have a cup o' tea with me," said Roger. "It'll ginger you up a bit and wash that blue off your nose. But wait till I see how things are going upstairs."

Tom could do no other than wait. At first his glances about the room were timid, as if he feared the door might open at any moment and he should be discovered in the act of mentally appropriating the room's contents. By and by he became bolder, and when his eye caught the big picture he summoned up courage to leave his chair and go nearer to it. Instantly the artist in him took fire, and when he had read the title he stood back and was held by the fascination of the young ruler's face. With no other light than that from the lamp and the fire, the details of the picture were lost, but the loss was not noticed. The artist had concentrated all his skill upon the face; and the eyes that gazed upon space, asking the question that was eternally unanswered, thrilled and stimulated the lad and strangely enough put him at his ease, so that when Roger returned, burdened with the teapot and a spare cup and saucer, he had entirely recovered his composure.

Roger had noted his expression, but he made no reference to it. "I've forgotten a plate," he said; "but that's easily remedied. This tea-cake'll lie nicely on top o' the brown bread."

He poured out the tea before he spoke again, and then he said quietly—

"The little lass is about as bad as she can be, Tom. They're fighting death upstairs, lad, and they fear death's winning."

Tom could not eat, but he drank the hot tea and felt better for it. Roger's appetite was not too good, but he ate the teacake and drank two cups of tea with

his eyes fixed upon the pink shade of the lamp. From time to time the lad looked at him and then glanced up at the other eyes which had something of the same expression.

At length Roger pushed back his chair. "Come, lad," he said; "we'll sit on the hearth and warm our feet. I'm all of a shiver myself."

Tom was warm now, and he knew that the shiver was not caused by cold. His own sorrow, which had been poignant and absorbing, became merged in a great compassion for the strong man whose features told what he was enduring; but he was only a boy and he remained dumb for want of healing words.

"We've done what we could, lad," Roger said when some minutes had elapsed. He was speaking to himself more than to Tom, but it was a comfort to have someone near whose presence excused speech, and he forgot that the boy was a stranger, for the relationship of a common grief brought the two together, and bridged the gulf of years and station. "My wife has never had her clothes off since the little lass came, and the doctor says it isn't a ha'porth of use to bring another man in. There's naught any man can do that isn't being done. And the women are wonderful. They smile and keep their pecker up, all three of 'em, and say she's in the Lord's hands. Do you believe in prayer, Tom?"

"I say my prayers," the lad replied huskily.

"Aye, you say your prayers same as I do," Roger went on without looking at him, "but do you believe it makes any difference? There's nearly two thousand million people living on this earth—hundreds o' thousands dying and hundreds o' thousands being born to fill the gap every time the clock ticks, and does it stand to reason that God can know aught about our little lass or go out of His way to set her on her feet again? Why should He?—that's what I ask myself. And there's another thing. The Book says we're all His children, and it says He knows what's best for us —then what's the use o' praying that He'll spare little

Nell's life, as if we knew better than Him? I say is there any sense in it?"

Tom's heart sank. This question which he had the wit to know was not addressed to him but to Roger's inward counsellor seemed to thrust away the last plank that bridged the gulf of his despair. If prayer was of no avail when the doctor was hopeless the case was indeed beyond remedy. He had prayed himself and with unfeigned earnestness and sincerity, but also with the uneasy feeling that his prayers carried very little weight, and that he must put his trust in the influence of older and more experienced petitioners. These statistical and reasonable arguments of Nell's uncle chilled his heart.

All the same when Nell's life was at stake he could not abandon hope without a struggle.

"It says the hairs of our heads are all numbered," he ventured. He held his breath at his audacity, but Roger took the interjection calmly.

"It does, lad, and it says He knows when a sparrow falls to the ground. It's a bit of oriental imagery, that is, but I reckon it means there's naught too trifling for God to be interested in. And mind you, Tom, it's right. Every little flower that blooms in the hedge bottom gets bite and sup from Him, and if they grow where there's no water He provides 'em with water bottles o' their own. I've followed that track till I've lost myself in the mists and given up thinking."

"Then don't you pray any more?" Tom asked in so hopeless a voice that Roger was roused.

"My dear lad," he said more brightly, "I pray as I never prayed before. I pray many a score times a day. I say 'Lord, save that little lass of ours!' and I don't even say 'if it be Thy will,' because I don't believe it's His wish that one of these little ones should perish. The Lord said 'Only believe!' and then He cured 'em. 'Don't I pray?' Everybody prays, lad, when there's naught else for it!"

"But if there's all them millions of people——!" Tom hesitated and looked appealingly into Roger's

eyes, and the man realised what he had done and with the realisation there came a flash of light.

"Aye, that beats us, doesn't it? But you know, Tom, He that set the world going is a sight cleverer than you and me, and what ways He may have o' getting to know what we're all needing passes our comprehension. But we can get glimmerings when we can't see all we should like, and it's just come to me that it's the same with God in His big way that it is with me in my small way. You see I like to think that all who work for me, whether at the mill or down at Keeley yonder, or at the motor-car shop, 'll look up to me as a sort o' father; and those who manage the business, same as my uncle Steve, know that aught that hurts any o' the hands hurts me. If any of 'em has any trouble on they know they can tell him, and if he can't help 'em himself he'll tell me and I'll see what I can do."

"I know," Tom broke in eagerly; "like when Tibbie Rennard had to have an operation, and you paid——"

"Aye, aye, poor Tibbie!" Roger interrupted hurriedly. "Well then, don't you see, you might say in a way that when they get into deep water I lend 'em a hand if I can at all, and that's the same as saying that I hear their prayers. Well, now, if a chap like me has a system that lets him know what's happening among a couple o' hundred or a couple o' thousand men and women in two or three parts o' the country I reckon He that set all the machinery o' the universe going and makes the clouds His chariot can plan a way o' hearing what two thousand millions are wanting. You take my word for it, Tom, that's what it means when it says 'the very hairs of your head are all numbered.'"

Roger's face lost its look of anxiety, and he left the room and tip-toed upstairs again as if to assure himself that his new-born faith was already justified. Tom rose at the same time, but Roger bade him remain seated.

"Bide a bit longer, lad. There'll happen be an improvement before so long."

There was none apparent, but when he returned there was still no cloud on his brow though his voice had lost its ringing note.

"Bad, very bad, poor little lass; and rambling a deal."

With an effort he turned his thoughts away.

"What about that picture o' mine, Tom? Have you finished it?"

Tom blushed. The picture was in the inside pocket of his overcoat, carefully rolled over a cardboard tube; and more than once whilst Roger was upstairs he had told himself that it would be an impertinence to refer to such a trifle, even if courage should not be wanting. Hot and uncomfortable he now produced it and handed it to Roger.

"Why, you've put the little lass in it!" Roger exclaimed. Then to the lad's amazement and distress he let the paper fall to the ground, and bending his head almost to his knees buried his face in his hands.

It was pitiful to see the big man cry and Tom's heart beat furiously, though he could not understand at all what it was that had produced the outburst. It was clear that in some mysterious way his poor sketch was responsible: the sketch on which he had bestowed so much pains, which he had painted and destroyed and painted and destroyed again, and preserved at last only because he despaired of ever producing anything adequate or worthy. How he wished now he had never brought it. A strong sense of shame overwhelmed him and he stooped down and recovered the picture, which he was beginning to return to its wrapper when Roger stretched out a hand and took it from him.

"It's over, lad!" he said. "That picture o' yours sort o' caught me in a squall and capsized me, but I'm right again now. It was the sight o' the little lass sitting there among the heather that did it. I'd been reckoning to have faith, and the minute I clapped my eyes on

her some lying false prophet inside o' me said 'You'll never see her *there* again, Roger!' and that did it. This isn't the picture I offered you a quid for, Tom."

Tom shook his head. "I burnt that one. I wanted *her* in; but it isn't like her, I know."

"It's her to a T," replied Roger; "only you've got her pouting a bit same as she was that day. But it's her, right enough. If aught happens her I wouldn't part with this for a hundred pounds. I don't know what a real painter 'ud say about it, but it suits me and it'll suit her Aunt Mary. What'll you take for it, lad?"

"I'd like to give you it if you'll have it," Tom said shyly.

"You'd like to give me it!" Roger looked at the lad's flushed face, and with quick intuition read the soul behind the eyes that were still bright with satisfaction and perhaps with the suspicion of tears, and his hesitation was only momentary. "I'll accept it with pleasure, my lad. I'll be proud to have it—aye, proud and thankful. And whatever happens to the little lass it'll remind me o' this night when you and me sat here and supped sorrow out o' the same cup. You haven't left school yet, have you?"

"No, sir," said Tom. "My father could like me to stop on a bit longer if he can manage it."

"And what then," inquired Roger. "What 'ud you like to be when you've finished schooling?"

"I'd have liked to paint pictures," he replied, "but father says he thinks I'd better be a gardener like him, because he doesn't think pictures bring much money in—not for a long time, anyway. But of course I can paint a bit in my spare time."

"Aye, your father's right," said Roger. "It's a slow job climbing *that* ladder, I fancy, for the rungs are over far apart. But what 'ud your father say, d'you think, if I was to put you under a man that would teach you to draw pictures for advertising butterscotch? There's this one here, now,"—he took up the sketch where Nell was seated among the heather

with her hat on her lap and her fingers toying with the ribbons—"If her hat was on the ground, and a tin of 'Three B's' on her lap it 'ud be a masterpiece: Blythman 'ud sell his shirt to get it. Not that we're going to do ought o' the sort with *this* picture," he added hurriedly, "but you see what I'm driving at? It would happen be more in your line than gardening, and there'll be brass in it from the start—bigger brass than your father earns."

Tom's pulse was beating fast. This was something too good to be hoped for; something he would never have dared to contemplate even in secret. For it meant lessons, apprenticeship, expense; and his father was poor. He held down his head and could say nothing.

"Would it be aught in your way, now?" persisted Roger.

"It would be fine," replied Tom in the tone of one who looks through the railings of a palace at glories that are denied him.

"Then I'll have a talk with your dad and we'll fix it up," said Roger, with the easy carelessness of the man to whom the opening of palace-gates presents no difficulties.

Tom said nothing because he couldn't. He was too full of an unaccustomed emotion that choked speech. His silence, however, was not noticed, for Mercy entered the room at that moment; or rather she opened the door and put her head round it as she exclaimed—

"You'd better ring for the doctor to come, Roger. There's a change o' some sort—it may be better or it may be worse!"

She went away without waiting for a reply, and Roger rose. His face was grey, and at that moment he looked old; but his voice was steady when he spoke. Then he came back to his chair.

"You'd better wait, lad. You'll worry if you go. Please God it'll be a change for the better!"

It was.

CHAPTER XIX

IN WHICH GEORGE TELLS A TALE OF DISASTER

IT was not until June that George returned, and he came alone. His coming threw a strong shadow across Nell's path, and filled her with forebodings of unhappiness. From "set fair," the barometer of her life fell suddenly to "change," and life was altogether too good for change to be desirable.

Nell had never been so much a child as now. Under her uncle's tutelage she had learned to laugh—a real, ringing laugh that brought a "bless her!" from the lips of the womenfolk. She had made a splendid recovery, and was in robust health; and with a child's forgetfulness and carelessness ran the risk of chills and all other likely ailments, and proved the toughness of her constitution beyond the doubt of croakers.

Dr. Herbert laughed. "I said she didn't want coddling," he remarked. "Why, bless your soul, it would take a steam-roller to crush the life out of that piece o' goods!"

Three months holiday from lessons had been prescribed, but no similar period had ever seen such a rapid advance in the child's education. Mary gave her a love for reading and guided her thoughts into pleasant browsing-grounds so different from the dreary, dusty pastures of the text-books. She encouraged her, too, in the use of the needle, and soon discovered that her fingers were apt for the work. In the kitchen,

where Mercy never found her troublesome, even though she was persistently and masterfully curious, she received the elementary education that leads to another form of enjoyment. But her happiest times were with her uncle. Roger taught her to ride a pony, to throw a line, to swing a club, to tickle trout and put them back again, to find a woodcock's nest, to imitate the call of birds, to watch for the coming of the night-jar and the corncrake, to distinguish the kestrel from the sparrow-hawk——

These were golden days to Nell—dazzlingly golden when her uncle was with her on the moors: when wild winds caught the tresses of her hair, flinging them in unheeded disorder about her face; and the big man was just a big, playful, boisterous boy. She had her own pony, and sometimes he rode with her, to the dismay (one fears) of the brown mare that had been made to revive old memories and take a fresh, surprised interest in life. Life a disease! A warfare! A jailer! Nonsense! Ask Nell! Life was good health! Fun! Liberty! Nell was not yet eight, and the blood was warm in her veins.

Scarcely less golden the days when aunt Mary and she drove out together in the pony-carriage, making leisurely progress because there were so many people to visit, so many parcels to distribute, so many inquiries to make. But the last house was passed in the end, and after that—the moor! What else could life be but a gorgeous pageant of brightly-coloured joys when work and play were made so pleasant for her in an atmosphere of love?

Nobody knew that her father was coming home. Letters were short and infrequent, and almost invariably from Rosie, and in many of them the child was relegated to a postscript or made the subject of a perfunctory inquiry. Rosie was having a good time at her husband's expense; and he, dear man, was growling away as usual, predicting that the earth was going to quake or the stars to drop, and throwing away in bucketsful the money of which he grudged

her a thimbleful. Roger and Mary laid each letter aside as it was read with a feeling of affection and pity for the flippant writer, and interpreted it as they thought best for the ears of the silently watchful child.

The engine at Wainwright's mill was within half-an-hour of stopping when George walked unannounced into his brother's private room one afternoon in June. James looked up in annoyed astonishment at the intruder, and the recognition that immediately followed was not tinctured with pleasure.

"I didn't know you were home again," he said.

"And you don't look as if you meant to fall on my neck and kiss me," sneered George.

Travel had not improved him. His hair was greyer, his face more lined, and there was a furtive look in his eyes that had not been there before. No unusual discernment was needed to see that he was harassed and ill at ease. His dress, too, was careless, almost untidy, and he was wearing a shabby Panama and smoking a cigar which he held obliquely at the side of his mouth like the Yankee of the cartoons. James eyed him with growing disapprobation.

"I have no intention of doing either," he said in his grimmest manner.

"Look here, Jim!" the other burst out; "I'm out of sorts and nearly out of my mind as well, and my temper is none of the best these days; but I haven't come over to quarrel with you, but because I want your advice and help. It'll take hours to tell the whole tale; but I'm in the ditch, and the very devil of a deep ditch, too, and you've got to help me out——"

"Wait a minute!" James interrupted, in a voice that was severe and yet calm; "you say I've *got* to help you out. Is that liability due to my having pushed you into the ditch? Have I been permitted to be my brother's keeper, when I haven't even been allowed to be the keeper of his daughter?"

"Oh, chuck it, Jim!" George's temper was raw, and his irritability left no room for discretion. "Get into your working clothes, and give the parson turn

a rest! Can't you see I'm down on my luck and desperate? I've been darned unlucky and a darned fool into the bargain, and now the cops are on my track. It'll take ten thousand pounds to save me, and I want 'em quick—quick. I tell you I'm up to the neck in the ditch."

James, Justice of the Peace, had paled a little at the mention of the word "cops," but his voice showed no signs of relenting as he replied:

"'What a man soweth,' George, 'that must he also reap.' It isn't my custom to come to quick decisions which I might have to repent. If you come again to-morrow morning, I will spare an hour to hear your explanation and—confession, and I will give you such advice as I can. And I hope you will come with a more subdued manner, so that your affairs can be discussed without these unseemly provocations. For the present you must excuse me. I have a dinner-party at the Hall to-night, and I fancy the carriage is here now. Shall we say ten-thirty to-morrow morning?"

For answer George rose and locked the door, putting the key in his pocket.

"I'm desperate, Jim," he said, "and desperate men don't think much of social functions, and aren't put about if the soup goes cold. You've just got to hear a thing or two before you go to your dinner-party, and it'll give you something to think about when your guests are talking the usual flap-doodle. I'm here alone. Rosie's with a fast lot in Chicago that have helped her to turn me at double-quick speed into a pauper. I lost heaps of money on the continent, and I thought I saw a chance of getting it back in the States. The Yanks were too smart for me. It was a wild cat scheme, and it's beggared me. That isn't the worst of it. I—borrowed somebody else's money, and that's down the drain, too. See? I want ten thousand pounds in a hurry, Jim."

James rose and stood erect, with his cold eyes meeting his brother's glance.

"Open the door, George," he said firmly. "Whether or no I shall see my way to assist you I cannot say, but I will certainly not do so under compulsion. I am glad our father did not live to see this day of humiliation. You have given me much to ponder over, and I can expect little sleep; but to-morrow at ten-thirty——"

He drew a bunch of keys from his pocket and locked the safe. He betrayed no sign of uneasiness, and evidently was not intimidated. A contemptuous smile passed over George's face, but he unlocked the door, and taking up his hat from the desk, said—

"You're the same sanctimonious, counterfeit Christian you always were, Jim. I must go and seek a friend who'll stick closer than a brother. I thought I should have been offered a bed, seeing that my place is closed; but no doubt your guests would be curious, so I won't press the claim."

He was answered in James's cold monotone—

"I should expect you to seek a lodging under the roof that shelters your child. That roof is not mine; but I will give you a lift if you like, as far as the Hall gates."

"Many thanks. I am your most humble obedient servant, but I'll see you at the devil first," and George slammed to the door and descended the staircase.

A hundred yards up the road the carriage passed him. Coachman and footman sat like carven images on the box, and their master was equally statuesque in his place below. Neither brother moved his head as the carriage went by, but George laughed unpleasantly. "Saint James in Britannia metal!" he muttered.

The blackbirds were piping in the trees of Gapstone as he passed his home, but his thoughts were too bitter to be sweetened by the melody. He bent his head and walked with his eyes on the ground, fearing recognition, but though he knew he was being stared at, no murmur of his name told that he had been identified.

It was long past the tea-hour when he was admitted by Mercy to the dining-room, where Mary and Roger

were sitting. Nell was in her own bedroom, absorbed in "preparation," and her absence was a relief. The two rose from their chairs with exclamations of astonishment and pleasure.

"Good lad!" said Roger; "now that's what I call real brotherly, dropping down out o' the moon and taking it for granted you'll be welcome!"

Mary was so pleased that she kissed him. She had only done it two or three times before, and always at Rosie's instigation, and had then been red and self-conscious, but on this occasion the kiss was spontaneous and sisterly.

"You'll be wanting a meal, won't you?" she asked. "Take George upstairs, Roger, and we'll be ready by the time he has had a wash and seen Nell."

When they reached the bath-room George laid his hand on Roger's arm.

"I'm not stopping here under false pretences," he said. "I may as well tell you candidly that I'd thought of putting up at Jim's, but that move is off. I'll tell you right away what I told him an hour ago—I'm over here because I'm in the ditch, and, for ought I know, there's a warrant out for my arrest by this time. Only a heap of money will save me."

Roger had closed the bath-room door, and was standing with his back against it.

"Well, if money'll save you, it isn't as bad as it might be; but if you were here because you'd cut a fellow's throat, Mary and me 'ud give you your meals and a bed till the boys in blue came to take you away. Anyway, if there's a warrant out, they'll hardly serve it before morning, and that'll give you and me and Mary a chance to talk things over and see what can be done. Is Rosie with you?"

"Rosie's with the devil in his town house at Chicago," said George gloomily; "and he can keep her for aught I care."

Roger looked at the downcast face, and knew the latter assertion was untrue.

"I'm sorry, lad," he said; "but we mustn't forget

she's the little lass's mother"; and George made no reply. He went in to see Nell, whose heart had sunk when her aunt had run up to prepare her. Her kiss lacked warmth, for her brain was throbbing with the dismal apprehension: "He's come to take me away—to take me away!" If George noticed the coolness, he did not remark upon it, and dismissed the child from his thoughts with the observation that she was growing into a fine girl, and would beat her mother at good looks. Then he damned good looks, and for a while was almost surly.

When coffee was served at the end of the meal, Mary invited her guest to bring his cup to the hearth, for a fire had been lit for the sake of its cheerful company rather than for need of its warmth; but the suggestion produced no result.

"I see Jim's face in that beastly picture, Roger," he said; "and I'm damned if I don't see my own as well. It drives me mad—I see red when I look at it. If it were mine, I'd slash it to bits and burn the frame! Whoever saw such eyes? They're augers: they bore holes in your brain: they raise Cain, I tell you."

"Come where you can't see it," said Roger, "and light your pipe. There's naught like a pipe when your nerves have a raw edge to 'em."

George ignored the suggestion. He was morosely irritable. "Turn the rotten thing with its face to the wall," he said; "and even then those eyes'll burn holes through the back. If you set any value on the beastly daub, you'd better not leave me in the room alone with it—not for two minutes."

"The value I set on that picture," Roger replied pleasantly, "is close on seventy thousand pounds, and it grows every year——"

"You always were a bit draughty in the attic, Roger," George broke in; "but I didn't know you were a hopeless maniac. If the thing's worth seventy thousand, for heaven's sake sell it and lend me ten. That'll put me out of my misery."

"There'll be no need to sell the picture to lend you ten," said Roger; "but that's something we can't talk about till Mercy's cleared the things away."

George went over sulkily to the easy chair and lit his pipe, and Mary asked about Rosie again, but he shook her off impatiently. "She'll come into the tale," he said.

Nell crept quietly into the room with Mercy, and went up to her aunt's chair, where she seated herself on the arm with her eyes on her father. It was easy for those who knew her to see that she was nervous, and distressed, though a stranger might have thought her defiant. Her state of mind gave her father no concern, but her beauty pleased him and had a soothing influence. His tone became gently derisive.

"So you ran away from uncle Jim?" he said. "Come here and tell me why."

"Because I hated them all," she replied, with no emphasis or emotion; and without moving.

"Hated good, kind uncle James?"—even a child could not mistake the note of mockery. "And what does aunt Mary say to a little girl who hates people."

"She says I ought to hate nothing but what is evil," the child replied.

"And you tell her it's one and the same thing! I'm surprised! Come here and sit on your daddy's knee, and tell him how pleased you are to see him, and how delighted you'll be if I take you back with me to see your mother."

The words meant nothing, and he had no idea what turmoil they roused in the child's heart; what darkness they spread over the child's soul. Nell seated herself on his knee, but her lips remained awkwardly closed, and she sat rigidly with her hands on her lap and her eyes on the wall-paper, so that George soon tired.

"Did you leave your tongue at uncle Jim's?" he asked crossly. "You're as mute as a stuffed monkey. What time do you go to bed?"

"I'm going now," she replied: and slipped from

his knee. She pressed a kiss on her father's cheek; another on uncle Roger's lips; hugged aunt Mary tightly for a couple of seconds, and kissed her twice; and then darted from the room. George laughed.

"The kid seems to know on which side her bread is buttered," he remarked.

No sooner had he said this than he knocked the ashes out of his pipe and put it on the mantelpiece.

"When I married that girl I booked express for hell," he said savagely, "and I've landed there."

"Well, if you haven't," replied Roger bluntly, "your language is hot enough to show you're on the right road."

"But there's a way to heaven from the mouth of hell," said Mary gently.

Then he let himself go, and for several minutes the others sat silently listening to a storm of wild imprecations and accusations that electrified the atmosphere, but brought no enlightenment. Just as suddenly he pulled himself up.

"Excuse me! For a long time past I've been forgetting how to be a gentleman. I've not been much in the company of gentlemen—or ladies."

"That's all right," said Roger. "Mary and I aren't soon singed, so there's no harm done. Now just tell us plainly what's the trouble, and we'll put our three heads together and see if there isn't a way out."

George's manner changed entirely. He was like a man who had been drunk, and had awakened sober. His voice lost its bitterness, though there was still a hard, hunted look in his eyes.

"I'm down and out," he said quietly. "It isn't all Rosie's fault, either, though the girl thinks money is as plentiful as water, and you've only to let down your bucket when you want more. She won't believe mine's gone——"

"Don't pile it on too thick," Roger interrupted. "We'll say going."

"It's gone, Roger. If I sell Gapstone and a few securities I haven't been able to realise, I shan't have fifteen thousand, and you know what I had a few years back. Ten thousand I owe, and what is five—a beggar's portion—a pittance. I've lost five thousand in a night, or Rosie and I together have, three nights running, at Monte Carlo."

Mary's eyes were fixed on him sorrowfully, but Roger drew a note-book and pencil from his pocket.

"Go on," he said. "You figure it out you'll have five thousand when all's paid off. That's what I had to start with."

"Aye, but you hadn't Rosie!"

"You're right; I mustn't forget that—I'd Mary."

"Now, look here, Roger! We've got to face facts. Rosie will have blued that five thousand before I get back—if I ever do get back—and where am I then, and where's Rosie herself?"

He caught Mary's sympathetic eye as he spoke, and his lip trembled.

"I'm glad you still love her, George," she said.

"Love her! I hate her!" Then he looked up again, and seeing unbelief on Mary's face, kept up pretence no longer. "I'm a darned liar," he went on. "I don't hate her—that's where I'm let down—but I shall do soon. Some fellows would have killed her—chucked her, anyway, but she's ways with her that get over me. And she doesn't care for me like that. When I've no longer any money for her to fling about, I shall be like last year's gown—any servant girl or old clothes woman can have me for aught she'll care."

"Is there someone else?" Roger inquired.

"There's the fellow in Chicago I owe the ten thousand to," George replied. "I'm going to make a clean breast of everything, so listen. The money I'd set aside for the trip went before we left Europe, and I gambled to get it back—and lost. I sold one security after another, and went on gambling. It seemed to me it was the only way to keep Rosie, and I could

never make her understand that even a heap of money comes to an end when you're always using off the pile. Then we came to Chicago and got mixed up with a lot of fellows a sight smarter than me. One of 'em in particular—a millionaire, they say he is—pretended to be sorry for me, and put me on to a scheme for buying land in some wild part of the country which a new railroad was going to cross. He said ore had been struck in the district, and that in five years time, when the railroad was completed, there'd be a city there, and land would be worth more dollars than it would cost me cents. Only two or three knew of it, and if I cared to buy shares, I should be rolling in money in a few years. I hadn't to mention the railroad, because he was a director, and it was a close secret. If the news of the new line leaked out, the price of land would go up, and there would be the devil to pay."

He looked significantly at Roger, who nodded.

"I see where we're getting to. Go on!"

"I didn't see," George replied. "I thought the man was a friend. I bought all the shares, though the other fellows seemed reluctant to sell, and I borrowed fifty thousand dollars from a man my friend introduced me to in order to complete the transaction. I oughtn't to have done so, of course, but I mentioned the railroad, and it was only then that he let me have the money."

"Is there written evidence of that?" Roger inquired.

"Yes, there is. I was a darned fool. Then——" He paused and seemed to find it difficult to continue.

"Then," said Roger, "you found out there wasn't any ore, and there wasn't going to be any railway, and the lender discovered the fraud and pressed for his money, and you've no written evidence to implicate your friend and that's the ditch you're in?"

"That's the ditch I'm in," replied George.

"I've only one more question to ask," said Roger.

"Is either of these men friendly with Rosie—very friendly, I mean?"

George became excited again, but this time he refrained from swearing.

"You've got it first time. The fellow I've borrowed the money from follows her like her shadow. They're as thick as thieves——"

"You've fallen among 'em, George. I'm sorry for you, my lad. Whether we can save Rosie or no now that you've run away'll depend on her; but we can, maybe, save some of your brass. What's to be done, Mary?"

"How soon could you go?" she asked.

"As soon as we can get berths," he replied. "How soon will that be, George?"

George was looking at them both in astonishment.

"Do you mean to say you'll go back with me?" he asked blankly.

"Aye, I'll get you out o' pawn, and see what can be saved out of the fire," Roger replied. "There's more than one can play at a bluff game."

CHAPTER XX

IN WHICH ROGER EXAMINES HIS ACCOUNTS

A WEEK later the two men sailed and it was the end of September when Roger returned. His letters had contained only brief allusions to what was happening. "I'm among a crooked lot, my lass, and I'm leaving naught to chance. I thought I was fly; but I'm in my cradle compared with these chaps. Things are going pretty well all the same, and the tale will keep till I get back."

Mary had no misgivings. If any man could make the crooked straight, repair the breach and retrieve the situation she was convinced it was her husband. Mercy, knowing nothing for certain but guessing a good deal, was exactly of the same opinion. "It's come to a bonnie pass when his proud brothers have to cry to him to pull 'em out o' the bog and set 'em on their feet again. They scorned him in their prosperity, and he might have said same as Jephthah to the elders of Gilead: 'Did not ye hate me and expel me out o' my father's house? and why are ye come to me now when you are in distress?' But he's too soft-hearted to say aught o' the sort."

"Nay," said Mary, "he shall be no Jephthah, Mercy, to bring sorrow at his home-coming."

"He's too much sense for that," replied Mercy.

All the time Nell hugged her apprehensions in secret and longed for, yet dreaded, her uncle's return "He'll bring them back with him," she told herself, but she

never gave voice to her fears nor allowed herself to betray them lest they should be confirmed ; and even her aunt did not suspect how much the sunshine of the child's life had been dimmed. Every week Nell walked up the hill to Gapstone to see if preparations were being made, and on each occasion returned with feelings temporarily relieved. When she was told that her uncle was coming home alone, she said " Not mother and daddy ? " and went into her bedroom to weep tears of satisfaction behind a locked door.

Three days after her birthday he arrived.

" You'll have to make the best of your uncle and auntie a while longer—maybe a long while," he said to her, when the clasp of her arms about his neck allowed him to speak.

" I hope I shall live with you and auntie for ever and ever," she replied intensely ; and his voice was rather husky as he said—

" You're our own little lass, aren't you ? and we shall be like to find a place for you in the nest till you get a nest of your own."

" I shall never, never want another nest," she said with the emphasis proper to a maiden who had entered on her ninth year.

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" They rooked him, Mary ; rooked him badly," Roger explained when the two were alone ; " and they'd an easy job on. Those two lads never had much about 'em, but if Jim has no great business ability he's slow and steady, and has sense enough to trust the ship to mates who have masters' certificates. Brook and Wood are both good fellows and Jim would do better if he'd give 'em more band. He won't make headway very fast, won't Jim, but he'll never go on the rocks, you may bet on that. He'll be worth more to-day than when the old man died—not a deal, but he'll have made money.

" Now poor George has always been short o' stuffing, but he could make a good show and had a glib tongue

and managed to keep on the old man's blind side. It's lucky for George that father died when he did—another twelve months and the old man would have seen through him. He'd have seen through him before, and known he wasn't a ha'porth o' use to the business if the men hadn't liked him so much better than Jim, and screened him. They're both Wainwrights—made to spend brass, not make it; but with Jim it's turned to hoarding, which is just another form o' the same disease."

"Are you sure of that?" Mary asked, smiling.

"Certain sure! What bigger spendthrift is there than the man who saves his money and makes ducks and drakes of his life? The Old Book puts it plainly; 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?' It's what that young fellow on the wall is asking."

"Yes," said Mary thoughtfully. "I think you are right."

"George is the better chap o' the two, if it's right to judge," continued Roger; "but he's a poor sample of a Yorkshireman, and I shamed for him when we got over yonder. They had him on the grid, I can tell you; but I doubt if they'd have put him in gaol. That wasn't their game: what they were after was his brass and his wife."

Mary's gaze became more concentrated, but she did not interrupt.

"His brass they'd got: and this particular young landshark who had him between his jaws for that fifty thousand dollars was mad to have his wife. He had it in his mind, I reckon, that George 'ud be forced to sell her for that fifty thousand, but he was going to do his level best to get her cheaper. Anyway, all he had to do was close his teeth and George knew he was scrunched."

"And Rosie?" inquired Mary. "What was her position?"

"That's where you have me, lass. Rosie's mad with George for having lost his brass, though she's helped and enticed him to squander it. And she pays

him out by smiling on this young Steiner and going off with him to theatres and dancing-halls and swell restaurants, where he spends money on her as if it was laid on in pipes like the water, and she can have all she wants. George raves and rages and is helpless; but he swears she hasn't gone worse wrong than that, and I'm inclined to think he's right. Nobody else believes it, and nobody else will who sees what's going on."

"Then why do you?" Mary asked.

Roger hesitated. "I don't know—I suppose because I want to, and I can't help liking the lass. She's a tantalising little demon that 'ud be no worse for a good hiding; but I doubt if she'll let any man go too far. I may be wrong——" he added doubtfully; "but I fancy it's gone no further than a lot o' brazen flirting."

"Then why don't they come home and end it?" Mary asked.

"Because pride won't let him and inclination won't let her. George 'ud cut a pretty poor figure over here now, and he thinks he sees his way to making brass out there, and getting Rosie into nice, domestic ways, 'like Mary,' he said. I can see Rosie washing-up and darning stockings and curtains! But it seemed best to leave him to work out his own salvation."

"And where is he now?"

"He's on my estate in Nebraska," replied Roger. "I own more square miles of land there than Jim owns square feet over here. That is, Floss and I do between us. I bought the whole bag o' tricks and cleared the sharks off. Maybe I paid more for it than it's worth, but that remains to be seen. The Chief of Police in Omaha is a decent chap, and he put me on the track of a fellow who went with me to inspect my purchase, and he's hopeful. There's no ore, and a lot of it's 'bad-lands,' but I kept my eyes open and I fancy I can make it pay. Steiner laughed in my face when I paid him. 'It's short of a railroad,' he said. 'It's going to have a railroad,' I told him. 'I've looked to that'; and you'd have laughed to see how his jaw dropped."

"'You're a liar!' he said; and I just smiled and bade him good-day."

"But, Roger!" said Mary. "——a railroad!"

"All in good time, my lass. I didn't say when. There'll be a railroad, you'll see."

"And George?"

"I left George at Omaha with this expert—Mathieson, they call him. His forbears were Scotsmen. George'll do as he's told for a while at any rate, and he thinks he's keeping an eye on Mat in my interests. Rosie's there, too. It's a new sensation, you see; but I'm putting no brass on her stopping there, though I talked to her like a father and she said she'd try to be a good little girl."

"Poor Rosie!' said Mary.

"She's a rum un," said Roger reflectively. When George told her what Floss and I had done and that I was making myself responsible for the whole shoot she just said 'Good old Roger! But I don't like to be in anybody's debt, you know, so we'll give you something on account—we'll give you Nell!' George swore, but she only laughed and asked me what I put the kid's value at, seeing that I'd taken over Gapstone and a few more bits o' things."

"Taken over Gapstone!" said Mary; "you're surely not thinking of living there, Roger?"

"Nay, lass; we must go steady after this for a while, and if this little spot'll do for you it's good enough for me. We've been very happy here, you and me, and we're among our own folk. I thought Gapstone 'ud do for the little lass, for it's much if she gets aught from her father. We can let it, you know—it'll bring a nice penny in—and it'll provide a bit o' dress allowance for her and make her feel independent. She's no need to know that we're doing it. Let her think it's her father."

Mary's eyes filled with tears. "It's just like you, Roger," she said; "but aren't you going too fast?"

"No," he replied; "it'll pinch me for a year or two, but I wrote Floss and she turned up trumps: cabled

me to do what I liked and she'd stand in. Nay, we're all right. It'll turn to profit as sure as death—I know it will. Some o' the chaps over there stared when I drew a plan up, but Mathieson said : ' Man, it'll work ! ' And it *will* work. If George has aught about him, he'll make brass yet."

" I suppose you're showing him your usual quixotic generosity," said Mary ; and a twinkle came into his eyes.

" I said to myself : ' Now what 'ud Mary do if she'd this thing to settle ? ' " he replied ; " and then I did it."

" Grease-pot ! " said Mary ; but the reply pleased her.

Upstairs Nell was sitting on the broad window-seat clasping her legs which were bunched up in her night-dress. It was a warm evening and night lingered over its duties, holding back the coverlet of darkness from the narrow valley. A thin wash of faded colour even yet stained the sky in the north though stars were glimmering faintly like lamps dimly seen through the mesh of curtains.

" You'd better be getting into bed, Nell," said Mercy, " or we shall be having you laid up again."

" If you were aunt Edie's maid you'd have to say ' Miss Eleanor '—or else you'd catch it."

" Oh, well, I aren't aunt Edie's maid, and I'm not going to be."

" Amen ! " said the child.

" Have you said your prayers ? " Mercy asked. It was another hint ; but there was no movement on the window-seat.

" Yes," was the demure answer. " I didn't forget you, so don't worry. When I've finished with auntie and uncle I always say ' and have mercy on Mercy,' and then I go on to mother and daddy—only I put it the other way about—daddy and mother ; and I finish off with all the other aunties and uncles in a breath."

" That isn't praying," said Mercy reprovingly. " It's just saying something off by heart, and about as much good as if you were to say ' Jack and Jill went up the hill ' ! "

The child turned large, solemn eyes upon her, but the solemn voice was charged with mischief.

"Thou art a good woman, art thou not, Mercy? Almost as good as uncle James?"

Mercy's face relaxed. "It's well you've your nightie on," she said; "you'll be that much easier smacked."

Nell took no notice. "I put a bit of real genuine into my prayers to-night," she said gravely: "I said 'I thank Thee for keeping mother and daddy in America and please keep them there for ever and ever, Amen!"

Mercy was genuinely shocked and troubled.

"But my dear lamb that was naughty; it was wicked! The Bible says 'Honour thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.' God would be vexed with you for saying that."

Nell shook her head. "No, He wouldn't. He'd have known I meant it, you see, whether I said it or not; and auntie says when anything happens that we've wanted very much it isn't grateful if we don't thank God."

"Yes, that's all right," said Mercy; "but there's things you didn't ought to want and to ask for——"

"But my dear Mercy," broke in Nell in the languid manner of her aunt Edie. "He's *answered* the prayer, and I'm *bound* to thank Him; so there's an end of it. Now I'll get into bed."

"Did ever anybody hear or see such a child!" said Mercy; and Nell laughed and hugged her for quite half a minute when she stooped to tuck in the clothes.

In the room below Roger was busy with an accumulation of letters and accounts. He went through them quickly and methodically, sorting them into heaps. When he had finished he leaned back in his chair and for a long time was lost in thought. Everything was going well; the reports from the Butterscotch Works were excellent, but for the first time motors had beaten butterscotch. Something more must be done for the workpeople whose spirit and loyalty were all that could be desired.

"You're short of money yourself just now," one inward voice reminded him, "and everybody is satisfied. You pay top wages—what more need you do? Now is the time to increase your directors' fees and pay big dividends. Look what a lot of ordinary shares you hold!"

He nodded, as if the reminder and suggestion were duly weighed and noted; but he raised his eyes to the picture and smiled. Some other voice was speaking.

Unlocking another drawer in his desk he produced an account book from which he copied a number of figures on to a sheet of notepaper, adding others after a rapid calculation. Twice he verified the totals and then went to the door and called for Mary, who was in the kitchen.

She came at once and he gave her his seat at the desk and stood over her with an arm about her neck.

"See those figures, lass?" he said. "That's roughly the profit we've made on the three businesses since we started. It isn't to a hundred pounds but it's near enough—on the underside rather than the over. We've caught up to Jim in eight years!"

"But we're not worth all that money, Roger! Why, it's fabulous!" Mary puzzled over the figures with bent brow.

"We are!" said Roger. "We haven't got it, because we've shared it with other folks. Sam's got it, and Frank, and the workpeople. But we set out to make brass and we've made it, and that's what we're *worth*. We could have had a lump more for ourselves if we'd wanted."

"And not been half as happy," commented Mary.

"Well, we couldn't very well have been happier, lass," said Roger.

Mary's eyes were still scanning the sheet in front of her.

"But, Roger, in spite of all you've let other people have we're fearfully rich."

"We're middling well off—on paper," he replied. "We can't help it, lass. You've to get before you can give, and there's to be something in hand to keep the

machines going. I shall be short of cash for a bit with this land business, but it'll turn out a gold-mine, you'll see. It's an instinct, I tell you. I wonder what the old man would think if he knew."

"It isn't what *he* thinks," said Mary gently.

"No, that's true," replied Roger. Then, turning his head so that his eyes rested on the picture he continued:—

"I wonder what the *young* man thinks?"

"Shall I tell you what *I* think?" she asked. "I think we'd better give some more away. It frightens me!"

"That's just what I've been thinking," he said. "I got one or two champion ideas when I was in the States. Some o' the big firms over there taught me a few useful lessons; and I took a bit o' pains to find out how they managed their 'Welfare' schemes. Now, I'll show you some papers and tell you what I have in my mind."

And for the rest of the evening they talked of nothing else.

END OF PART TWO

PERIOD THREE

CHAPTER XXI

IN WHICH THE STORY IS CONTINUED ELEVEN YEARS LATER

THE thriving industrial town of Keeley was in holiday mood. Flags were flying on the public buildings and from the upper windows of some of the business houses. Most of the shops were closed like the large factories whose operatives had been crowding the causeways for more than an hour. Every face was set in the same direction, and the crowd moved leisurely and with the good-humour of holiday makers whose holiday involves no loss of pay. The day had the sultry warmth August often brings, and the distance held a slight haze that put one in mind of autumn and drew one's attention to the foliage of the trees that were planted at regular intervals on either side of the north road. The leaves were shrivelling and turning brown: summer had almost had its day.

The hollow-cheeked, grey-bearded stranger at the door of the Clarence Hotel shifted his cigar with a movement of the tongue from one corner of his mouth to the other, and looked at his watch. The watch was a gold hunter and out of keeping with the man's condition, which was shabby-genteel—more shabby, indeed, than genteel, though an air of faded refinement partly excused the shabbiness. He had been standing there, juggling with the cigar which had been allowed to go out, and watching the crowd with incurious eyes,

for quite twenty minutes, and now with his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat he stepped on to the causeway and joined himself to an unattached pedestrian—a working-man with the neb of a cloth cap shadowing an intelligent face.

"Reckon there's something special in the town to-day?" he said with a strong nasal accent.

"Opening a new park and art gallery," replied the other curtly, for all foreigners were suspect and there was something in the stranger's tone that suggested a sneer at the Englishman's parochial excitements. Having given the required information he quickened his steps.

The stranger followed a pace or two behind, and asked no further questions. Men and women stared at him as they passed, but he took no notice, and was content to follow them up a steep street and then along a level residential road until the imposing gates of the park were reached and he entered with the rest.

"Old Benson must be dead," he said to himself. "Not a bad idea for the Corporation to take the place over"; but his face kept the secret of his thoughts.

He did not allow himself to lose sight of the man in the cap, and distinguished him readily enough though there were scores of other men similarly attired. The man had edged his way through the crowd and taken up a position directly opposite the platform that had been erected in front of the hall. Seats had been provided, but these had long since been filled and numbers of people stood behind them. In this ever-increasing throng the stranger soon became wedged, and the man in the cap smiled like one who makes the best of a defeat when he found his questioner at his elbow.

"Crush, eh?" he remarked, and the stranger nodded.

A few minutes later a storm of cheering greeted the arrival of the platform grandees—mayor and town clerk with a sprinkling of aldermen, a clergyman or two, several ladies, and two or three gentlemen in silk hats and frock coats. One of the last named, a thin,

clean-shaven, immaculately-atti d man, with a flower in his button-hole, removed his hat and seated himself in the central chair with the mayor on his right and the mayoress and town clerk on his left. The mayor was a portly, bearded man who shewed off his chain to advantage, and a grim smile hovered about the stranger's lips.

"You've got the lean and fat kine in neighbouring stalls," he said in a low voice; and the other smiled quite as grimly.

"Aye, and him 'at's always had t' best pasture has done it least credit," he replied.

"Who is the well favoured individual who is swelling so alarmingly?" the stranger asked.

"That's Sam Binns, the mayor—Binns' unBeatable Butterscotch: you'll have heard o' the 'Three B's,' happen?"

"And the chairman?"

"That's Sir James Laycock, head o' the firm o' Wainwrights, and that's his wife sitting t' other side o' t' mayor. Sam isn't married, but the young lady on t' other side o' t' chairman acts as mayoress. They're a bit akin, Sam and her, over t' left; and they do say Jim Laycock isn't pleased wi' t' job, seeing 'at she's his niece."

The stranger fixed his eyes upon the girl, but gave no sign of special interest, and the other went on.

"Yon old lady over yonder, sitha, is Sam's mother; and her 'at's pushing her in t' bath-chair is Roger Laycock's missus—her 'at's brought up yon lass on t' platform."

The stranger's eyes wandered from one to another of these various notabilities during the hymn and prayer with which the proceedings opened, but not a muscle of his face moved except when the cigar made its periodic transition; and the eyes remained cold and indifferent.

"Doesn't seem over popular," he commented when the faint cheers had died down that welcomed the chairman on his rising.

"Popular!" replied the other with a sneer. "He's t' biggest skinflint i' Airedale, bar none. He can't bide to see t' mill floor swept 'cos t' dustcarts get t' sweepings for nowt. Popular!" The man spat on the only vacant ground available, which was between his boots.

The chairman's voice did not carry well, and after straining his ears for a moment or two the stranger turned to his neighbour again.

"What makes him occupy this position then? Is it he who has given the park to the town?"

Others overheard the low inquiry and there was a subdued titter.

"Him give it? Jim Laycock? It 'ud ha' been in letters a yard high if he'd gi'en it. Nob'dy knows who's gi'en it, and nob'dy knows what he's doing i' yon chair, but them 'at axed him. It'll be 'cos he's bought a handle to his name and has more brass nor he know what to do with. They pat his back on t' chance 'at one o' these days he'll shell out for t' good o' t' town; but they don't know Jim!"

"You're right there, lad," one or two around agreed.

"Right? When you've addled your bit o' wage off o' one like yon for twenty year you're like to be right," was the reply.

After that there was silence for a while because the town clerk had risen and was reading from a formal document. His voice was clear enough, and so was the mayor's when his turn came. A faint smile again curved the stranger's lips when Sam began his speech, but he listened carefully.

Sam spread himself like a peacock. It was his first opportunity to unfold his powers before such a crowd, and the cordial reception he had received put him in good heart and at his ease. His eulogium of the anonymous benefactor who had laid the whole town under an obligation though he was contnet to do good by stealth was not overdone, and its sincerity could not be mistaken. The chairman applauded as warmly as the rest, but sat with bowed head when it was his

turn to be thanked for his great kindness in consenting to preside—" one who bears an honoured name in this district, and whose firm stands at the head of the textile industry in upper Airedale."

" Aye," commented our friend with the cap; " t' name's honoured enough, but not when it has James Wainwright in front of it."

" Whose name has it to be that brings honour to the surname ? " asked the stranger.

" Roger's," was the prompt reply, " and he's as plain a chap as me, nearhand, though they do say he could buy his brother up and scarce miss t' money."

" Are there only the two of them ? " the stranger asked indifferently.

" Nay, there was another—George, him 'at's father to yon young lass 'at's mayoress; but he married a dancing-lass and by all accounts he's been dancing himself on hot cinders ever since. But nob'dy knows for certain, for he's been gone this ten year and more, and lives i' your part o' the world judging by your twang. Well, it's about owered wi', and I'm for seeking a drink."

" That will suit me very well, too," said the stranger.

Their way took them past the back of the platform where Sir James's car was waiting. Lady Laycock was already seated, diverting her eyes carefully from the mayor who was talking in a low voice with her husband. Sir James had one foot on the step and seemed anxious to be gone, and he wore an uneasy expression that was not far removed from a frown.

" Well, good-day," he said, as he shook hands and took his seat.

The stranger eyed all three intently, but made no comment. A moment later he halted for a second or two as he came face to face with the occupant of the bath-chair and her escort.

The mayoress had joined them, and passers-by turned their heads to look at her. She was tall and strikingly handsome, and as she took the older lady's place she bent her head and whispered into the white-

haired old lady's ear ; and the other lady, walking at her side, smiled as she overheard the low communication.

" Them's three o' the best," said the man with the cap. " No swank there."

The stranger stared almost rudely. Then he seemed to wake up—" Where's that darned bar ? " he asked irritably.

Keeley had been left a mile behind before Sir James spoke, and even then his wife had to prompt him.

" All went quite well, I think, James ? "

James sighed deeply. He was worried, and he wished his wife to realise it, and to make sympathetic inquiry : to drag out answers that should seem reluctant, in order that she might experience a part at least of the same exquisite torture he was undergoing.

" Quite well," replied the voice ; but the tone contradicted the words.

" What has gone wrong, dear ? "

" Nothing. It is just the seed of a suspicion that has been sown in my mind. We will forget it. How brown the grass is becoming——"

" Is it something that wretched man, Binns, has been telling you ? I distrust these upstarts——"

" My dear ! " remonstrated her husband, " Binns has done very creditably. I will admit I was surprised and—shall I say ?—pleased." The " shall I say ? " softened the lie into a mere compliment and rendered it harmless. " It was during the last minute or so that he let drop a remark that has perhaps unnecessarily disturbed me."

" Purposely, no doubt," commented the lady.

" I don't think so." It pleased Sir James immensely to find himself so scrupulously fair. " He assumed that I was in the secret and when he found I wasn't —suspected I wasn't, I ought to say, for I was careful not to disclaim knowledge—he drew in his horns and became circumspect."

" What are you talking about ? " his wife inquired. " What secrets are there to make all this fuss about ? "

" The secret of the anonymous donor."

"But surely everybody knows it is the duke."

"It is *not* the duke—that much I can say definitely. I very much fear it is one whom you and I have cause to dislike and distrust. That is the suspicion that is disturbing my peace, and which I would have kept from you if your penetrating eyes had not been too sharp."

She turned the same eyes upon him now, but they were anything except penetrating.

"I don't understand," she said.

He would not look at her now. His eyes were on the rug where his feet were resting as he breathed the one word—"Roger."

"Roger!" His wife's voice expressed amazement, incredulity, horror; and Sir James glanced significantly at the chauffeur; but the car was closed, and the lady did not think it necessary to restrain herself. "Do you mean to tell me that all the fulsome things you said in your speech are to be applied to *Roger?*"

In her heart she was certain of it, and knew that her husband was, too, and the humiliation of their position hit her with the force of a physical blow. She was angry and at the same time stunned.

"My dear, I had no doubt it was the duke, and my references to the generous heart——"

His wife interrupted him with a mirthless laugh. "If this gets out," she said; "as of course it will, we shall be the laughing-stocks of the countryside."

This was too true to bear contradiction, and Sir James sighed. It was a depressing end to an afternoon that had had its exhilarations. Both were silent for a couple of minutes. Then Lady Laycock spoke.

"There's nothing more to be said. I shall try to forget it. It may not, after all, be true. Did you notice those pictures of Turner's boy among the local exhibits?"

He nodded. "I wasn't allowed to miss them. Binns saw to that."

"Not bad, I thought; but the catalogue price was ridiculous—sixty-five and forty guineas!"

"They were sold all the same. Smith bought them," he replied gloomily; then added—"Let me see; they're burying his father to-day are they not?"

"Yes," his wife answered. "I gave the woman your message. She seemed to think one week's notice to give up the house inconsiderate. She doesn't know where to go."

"That's the gratitude one gets for the bunches of grapes we sent down," he replied peevishly; "and you told her, I suppose, she was to have a fortnight's wages? Surely the woman must realise how much this long illness of her husband has inconvenienced us."

"These people have short memories," she said.

The car turned in at the gates of the drive and a little way down two men stepped aside to allow it to pass, baring their heads at the sight of the occupants.

"Who were they?" the lady asked.

"Roger and his vicar—Payne," her husband replied. "They'll have been to Turner's funeral. It's like one of Roger's mad tricks—currying favour with Tom, Dick and Harry, and avoiding society as if it was plague-stricken."

"Like consorts with like," she said indifferently.

They stood at the door awhile after the car had gone. The mist was clearing and the mellow light of late afternoon lay soft upon the landscape, washing the varied tints with its warm amber. The lawn, newly-mown, was smooth as velvet. Not a weed showed on the gravel. The baronet's face lost some of its cloud as he looked upon the scene, but the next moment it returned.

"Do you know what Mrs. Haley told me?" his wife asked. "She says that Eleanor has engaged herself, or is about to do so, to Tom Turner, and that her aunt and uncle approve. It is common knowledge, she assured me."

"Our niece to marry my gardener's son!" Sir James almost groaned. "I knew—we both knew—that nothing but disaster could follow her adoption by

that fellow and his wife. They are both plebeians; and she herself——"

"Is that woman's daughter." Lady Laycock finished the sentence for him.

"I wonder what has become of George," she continued as her husband remained moodily silent. "I wonder if he divorced her when she left him. They may both be dead for anything we know."

"Pray God they are!" he replied, not too piously. "Their very memory pricks me like a thorn in the side. I am in constant fear of them turning up and bringing discredit upon us. One is never safe from one's disreputable relatives. To-day, whilst Sam Binns was uttering his platitudes I imagined I heard men and women whispering together—"What does Sir James think of his brother, I wonder?"; but the memory of the woman who wrought George's ruin is still more bitter. I would give much to have their death certificates in my keeping."

His wife laid her hand upon his arm. "Hush, James! the servants might hear you," she said in a startled voice. "What cause have you for worry? It is eight years and more since we heard of them. If *she* lives——" Edie could not bring herself to mention Rosie's name—"she is no doubt with the paramour who stole her—or his successor; and if *he* lives it is scarcely likely he will return to publish his shame."

"My nerves are jumpy to-day, I think there's a storm hanging about," said her husband. "Let us go indoors."

Lady Laycock was forty-six and looked no older; but her husband at the same age was bald, and what hair he had was thickly sprinkled with grey. There were crows' feet about his eyes with company of like kind in the deep furrows that lined his brow. Liver trouble gave a sickly pallor to his face and kept him thin. Strangers took him to be ten years older than he was, and they were right, for age is a matter of feeling, not of years, and James felt old.

CHAPTER XXII

IN WHICH GEORGE RETURNS TO GAPSTONE

ON the Sunday following the funeral, Mrs. Turner stood in the window recess of the drawing-room at Gapstone Hall and looked into the garden where her three younger children were walking. She had taken possession of the housekeeper's rooms the previous day, and the litter from the removal van had blown among the bushes, where it offended her eye. Sunday though it was, she would have had it removed, but Fred had laughed. "We'll leave a job or two for Monday, Mother;" and she had made no further protest.

She looked a rather pathetic object as she stood there in her loneliness, amid the faded but still garish decorations of the room. Her whole body was thin, but the face was pinched and the eyes were set back in hollow cavities where they nursed their weariness. Her girls told her she had a "ladylike" figure, by which they meant, perhaps, that she was neither coarse nor ungainly, but held herself like those whom in her younger days she had been in the habit of serving. There was refinement, too, in her features and her speech, though the latter carried a shade too much deference. Her husband, however, had always been a deferential man, and would have been shocked by its lack in his wife.

She was thinking of him as she stood there in the big house which Mr. Roger had so promptly and kindly

put in her charge, with that roughly-gracious way of his which made her acceptance seem like the conferring of a favour. If the dead know anything of what passes in the country they have left, her goodman would be glad they were so happily fixed. She had scarcely known Mr. Roger: certainly never thought of him as a possible counsellor, although he had done so much for Tom. Her thoughts wavered between the two men gratefully, but rested longest on the memory of her husband. He had been such a good, true mate and father—such a clever man, too, at his job: a lover of flowers, and as solicitous for their welfare as for his children's. Wages would never have paid him for his work if love had not added to them. She grew angry when she thought of wages, but the emotion was short-lived. He had been so patient and uncomplaining himself; so ingenious in devising sacrifices for his children's sake; so contemptuous of his own needs.

A hand was laid gently on her shoulder.

"Fretting, mother?"

Tears gathered then in her eyes, but she held them back.

"Work is the best heart's-ease, Tom. To-morrow I shall set to and clear the dust from these rooms. The house has been empty twelve months, and is lost in dirt."

"I don't like you to do it, mother, and there is no need. I would have made you all a home—willingly."

He had put his arm about her waist now, and she clasped his hand and leaned her head against his shoulder. They were like lovers as they stood there, talking quietly; and why should not a mother and her first-born son be lovers?

"I know, dear; but it is better as it is. We shall all be happier. Mr. Roger has given Fred the gardener's job, and there is work here for Nancy, too. You will want to marry before long——"

She stopped abruptly, and there was a long silence

which both wished to break and found words difficult. It was the mother who continued in the end.

"Tom, I'm afraid to speak, almost to think, of you getting married. *Will* she wed you, do you think?"

Tom's face became very hot, but he was glad the question had been put, and he answered calmly,

"I hope so, mother. We are very good pals, Nell and I; and I think—I feel sure—she cares for me—like that."

"It frightens me, Tom!" The mother's hand tightened on his, as if the objective presence of her fear were there. "We have always been poor, and she——"

"She is poorer than I am," he interrupted. "She has nothing but what her uncle gives her. Her father's money is gone; her father himself probably dead, and, if not, almost certainly beggared. I have a good salary——"

"Yes, I know," she broke in again, "but this Hall is hers——"

"Her uncle's gift!"

"Let me go on, dear. It is hers, and you would probably live here——"

"Nonsense! Look where her uncle lives!"

"I know; but her uncle will wish her to live here. Mark my words, and you'll find them true. And don't you see what a gap will stretch between us? 'My son is my son till he gets him a wife!' But with a wife like Miss Nell——"

"Mother!" Tom's voice was angry as well as troubled, and the flush made his good, strong face almost handsome. "It's a poor, shallow heart that hasn't room for a good mother, whoever else may creep into it. You ought to know Nell better, to say nothing of me."

"I know you both, but do you know me? Folk will say what a lot it means for Sir James Laycock's niece to bring herself down to marry Martha Turner's lad; but they'll never think what a lot it means to Martha Turner to be cut off from her boy. To see

him, maybe, every day, with a whole ocean between them. And to know she can't cross it, however hard she may try. I shall be proud of you both, but where you go I can't follow."

Tom's arm left his mother's waist, but protest died on his lips when he saw her eyes, and he bent and kissed her.

"Foolish old mother!" he said. "We'll shew you! If Mr. Roger thought I was a chap of that sort, he'd kick me down the steps to-morrow. You're seeing ghosts, mother; but that's because you're run down and in trouble. Aren't you glad your boy is getting on?"

"I praise God for it night and morning. Your father would have lain down to make a stepping-stone for you, and so would I."

"Poor old dad!" said Tom. "I wonder what he would say if he knew that my two pictures sold the other day for more money than he ever earned in a year."

"Not for more than he earned, Tom," she said proudly.

"No, you're right—for more than he ever got, anyway."

Then she turned and took both his hands in hers, looking up into his eyes.

"God bless and prosper you, Tom, in your love-making and in your business; and may He bring you into a large place and keep your heart humble and full of His love. It is your mother's prayer; and her own sorrow will be swallowed up in joy!"

Then at last she cried, and he took her in his arms and comforted her. In a moment or two she recovered.

"Here! Get you gone!" she said. "She'll be waiting for you somewhere, I'll be bound. Did I never go a-courting myself?"

In the evening she was alone. The young folk had gone to church; but she stayed at home to company with her thoughts, and the sunshine drew her to the lawn and the neglected flower-beds. Thus, on many

a summer s evening, she had walked with her husband, though never within view of the windows of the Hall.

All at once something not connected with the ordinary senses told her she was no longer alone. No sound of footsteps had reached her ears, but she was quite sure somebody or something was at hand, and she turned to see a man standing at the farther end of the lawn with his eyes fixed on the front of the house. Something familiar in his appearance checked her from calling out or even approaching him immediately, but further scrutiny showed her that the man was unknown to her. It was his figure that had deceived her; it was so like Sir James's; but Sir James was clean-shaven, whereas this man had an untidy grey beard and wore a shabby soft straw hat at a curious angle on his head. His clothing, too, was that of a man who dressed carelessly if not poorly.

He must have seen her, but until she came up to him he never looked in her direction; then he said abruptly:

"Are you the caretaker?"

It was Sir James's voice, with the smoothness missing, and an inkling of the truth entered her mind, and brought a tremor into her voice as she replied that she was.

"Who owns the place?"

"Miss Laycock, sir; but her uncle, Mr. Roger Laycock, has the letting of it." Then she put her question. "It isn't Mr. George, is it, sir?"

He did not answer at once, but turned and looked into her face, scrutinising the features.

"I don't recognise you," he said.

"My husband was your brother, Sir James s, head gardener," she replied; absolutely sure by now that she had guessed correctly. "I used to see you sometimes, sir, at the Hall."

"Well," he said, "your eyes are sharper than most folk's, for I haven't been spotted before. Is there a bed aired?"

"There soon could be, sir," she answered; rapidly reviewing possibilities in her mind.

"Let us go inside," he said.

He strode off towards the front entrance, when her voice pulled him up. "The front door is locked and bolted, sir; but I'll see if I can open it."

"No matter," he replied; "I'll go your way."

Near the morning-room door he stopped. It had been his own den in the old days.

"This'll suit me best," he said. "Put me a fire in, will you? Are there any stores in the place—any wines, spirits?"

"I couldn't say, sir," she replied timidly. "We only came in yesterday, and Mr. Roger hasn't told me. I believe I have a little whiskey."

"Then bring it in and some hot water. I'm always chilly. Any bedroom you like'll do if it's warm."

Mary and Roger were at supper when Nancy brought her mother's message. The girl had run all the way, and was out of breath with excitement as much as with the exertion. Mercy had shown her into the dining-room, and remained there herself, drinking in the information which Nancy imparted in gasps.

"Now look here, my lass," said Roger calmly; "you just walk quietly back and tell your mother I'll be up in half an hour. Don't run as if you'd been sent for the fire brigade; and don't tell anybody else what you've told us—not even Tom, unless he happens to be by himself."

He looked questioningly into Mary's eyes when the girl had gone and saw that they were troubled.

"I used to expect this," she said; "but latterly I haven't thought about it."

"I have," he said. "I've expected it ever since Mat wrote to say George wasn't collecting his remittances, and that he'd failed to trace him. It's perhaps as well he's come, but I'm troubled about Nell. Maybe we ought to have told her he was alive. What'll she think of it, Mary?"

Mary shook her head. "Who knows?" Then she smiled. "She isn't a weakling, Roger. She'll decide for herself."

"Will you go up with me, lass?" he asked; but again she shook her head. "You'll do better alone," she said.

He found George very much at his ease in the morning-room. It was the smallest and by far the homelest of the state apartments, more simply furnished than the other rooms and odorous of smoke. George was reclining in a low saddlebag with his head almost on a level with its arms and his legs stretched out upon the thick Turkey carpet which reached up to the fireplace. Beside him on a smoker's oriental table was the bottle of whiskey and a jug of water. The glass was in his hand.

He looked up and a sour smile crossed his face, but he did not rise when Roger entered unannounced.

"Another chapter in the Rake's Progress, Roger," he said in a thick voice that had very little humour in it. "The rake returns to his ruined hearth—wrecked in body and purse."

"And with a fondness for the stuff that's wrecked him," said Roger grimly. "I hoped you'd chucked that habit, George."

"Best friend I have, my lad. Warms me when I'm cold, feeds me when I'm hungry, and blinds me when I'm seeing things I don't want to see. A good, true friend, who never preaches and pulls a long face. Sit down, can't you?"

Roger drew forward the companion saddlebag and seated himself in it.

"You'll have a thick head if you finish that whiskey," he remarked, and George grunted.

"You haven't altered as much as me," he said. "Darned if anyone would take you for a day over forty and you're fifty-two, you know. I'm forty-four and look sixty. Say, don't I look sixty?"

Roger nodded. "When a fellow lives as you live he lives fast; and that beard of yours would put ten years on to anybody."

"Aye, but look at my face," said George; "it's an old man's face, seamed and wrinkled, with hollow cheeks and temples. Isn't it an old man's face—a darned ugly face, too?"

"No, it isn't ugly," said Roger, "but your expression at this minute wouldn't do for a picture of the child Samuel at his prayers. Let's chuck your looks and get to something more interesting whilst you're sober enough to talk intelligently. What's brought you back to life, and what's your programme? I'd got to think lately you were living somewhere over yonder with a stone slab on your chest."

George's face twisted ironically. "Sorry to disappoint you," he said. "I've made overtures to death, but we don't just see eye to eye apparently."

The note of sternness returned to Roger's voice.

"Drop it, George," he said. "Mary and I will do our best for you and make you welcome——"

"And what about the other member of the family," George broke in.

"Nell will speak for herself," continued Roger firmly. "She doesn't know you are here and it'll be a shock to her, for you haven't played a father's part, let me tell you. What I'm wanting to know is whether you've come home for good or are going back, and if there's anything you re wanting me to do for you. If you'll excuse me saying so you don't seem to have struck oil during these years you've been in hiding."

"Struck oil!" George drained the glass and set it on the table with the empty bottle. The simple act was not accomplished easily, for the hand that held it shook as if it was palsied, and when he tried to raise himself in his chair he succeeded only with difficulty. All the same his head was clear and words came freely enough. "Struck oil! I've struck it many a time for other fellows who've struck the prize out of my fingers. I've had riches in my hand and had 'em snatched from me. Now I've come home—come *home*, you understand, and I'm stopping at home; and how much do you think the rake has brought with him?"

"What he carries on his back, I guess," replied Roger, curtly.

George looked at him and made no reply. "I've paid my hotel bills so far," he said sullenly after an interval in which the two men eyed each other.

"Are you wanting money?" Roger asked. "You'll have to live somewhere——"

"I'm living *here*," George said with emphasis; "here at Gapstone; *here*, I tell you."

The tone was defiant, but Roger remained calm.

"That's as may be," he said. "The house belongs to Nell, and not to you, and it'll be for her to say; but it isn't likely she'll raise any objections—not if I don't; and whether I do or no depends on one or two considerations."

"Yes?" It was half a question, half a sneer; but Roger ignored the unpleasant half.

"I want you to tell me either now or when you've slept the whiskey off what it all means. Is Rosie——?"

"Rosie's name isn't mentioned," George interrupted.

"Very good. Then you're on your own. As I've been a father to Nell all these years, and you say you're going to live in her house, I'm entitled to ask at whose expense, and what sort of life are you going to lead?"

There was nothing menacing in the tone, but Roger leaned forward and looked straight into the eyes that were beginning to blaze, and before that steady gaze the other's fell.

"If you're able to keep yourself, well and good," Roger continued. "If you aren't, you mustn't look to Nell, but you can look to me. I don't suppose Jim'll pension you, but I will—if I must—for Nell's sake. But it will be on my terms, understand. We've been very happy, the three of us, and her life isn't going to be spoiled if I can hinder it. But there! I've no right to take it for granted that you'll spoil it, and I'd sooner by half think it'll be the other way about, and that you'd like to make her happier than ever."

"I'll tell her where I stand," said George sullenly.

"You'll tell me, lad," replied Roger; and raising his

eyes angrily George saw something on Roger's face that caused him to change his tone.

"Well, if you will have it," he said; "I've a couple of thousands—no more."

"Dollars or pounds?" questioned Roger.

"Pounds, you darned inquisitor," George replied; then added—"You can keep 'em for me if you like, or they'll be blued in a month or two."

Roger took this as a sign of grace. "We'll talk about that to-morrow," he said. "If I were you I'd get to bed now. I'd like to work the pump a bit longer, but I reckon I've done enough. Is there aught you're wanting?"

"Yes," said George grimly; "but the woman hasn't got it."

"Thank the Lord for that!" replied Roger, as he left the room. They had not even shaken hands.

"It'll pay you to be friendly with him, Roger," said Mercy when he had told the story of his reception. "Old Solomon says that a brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city; and their contentions are like the bars of a castle."

"Yes," said Mary, "'let patience have her perfect work.' You've been wonderfully patient hitherto."

"Aye, but he's tried my patience this time," said Roger. "But the poor beggar looks frightfully ill."

CHAPTER XXIII

IN WHICH THERE IS LOVE-MAKING

ALL unconscious of the new situation the Fates were preparing for her Nell set her face to the moors that Sunday evening with the feeling that something might very well happen before she returned, but that the "something" should have any connection with her parents never even crossed her thoughts. There had been a time when to her surprise she had found herself regretting that her parents were dead, for to her they were dead even though they might be alive. For three years now she had known all that her aunt could tell her, and she had received the news of her mother's infidelity without betraying any sign of horror or distress. It had all been very remote and incidental, like the occurrences in a novel, for she had been willing to forget her parents, who on their part had apparently forgotten her. If she had lacked love it might have been otherwise, but love was lavished upon her by the three who counted for more than all the rest—her aunt and uncle and Mercy.

It was when she was nearly eighteen that the thought occurred to her with startling suddenness that it was a misfortune to have parents like hers: that it made a void which nothing could fill and which robbed life of some of its charm.

There was a reason for this and one that was easily

discovered. It had dawned upon her that this pleasant companionship with Tom was something more than an agreeable intimacy, and the realisation came so swiftly that she was at first startled and for a time discomposed. But she let nobody know it, and her visits to the Turners' home were no less frequent. She looked upon them all, however, with other eyes, and it was when she saw their happy home relationships, the mutual devotion of parents and children, the loyalty and good-comradeship that existed between them that she felt her life to be deficient. For a few months she thought tenderly, hungrily, of her own mother and father ; then bitterly ; and later without emotion of any kind. When that stage was passed she ceased to think of them at all.

She was nineteen now, or would be in another month, but she felt and looked older. The strange child, however, had lost a good deal of her strangeness under the changed influences of her new home ; and only those who lived with her knew, and they not fully, what qualities were hidden below the surface of her everyday manners. The rough grit was rubbed so smooth by daily contact with a nature like her aunt's that those around her took it to be sandstone, but she had peculiarities that distinguished her from other girls, notably a straightforwardness of speech and defiance of convention that were almost masculine.

Tall, well-shaped, and walking with a springing foot that spoke of perfect health, she would have attracted attention anywhere ; but the added advantages of really beautiful features, quick, penetrating eyes and a rank abundance of rich, brown hair, gave her a distinction that left her without a rival in the district. But she was a man's girl, not a woman's ; one who could ride a horse bare-back, catch fish with flies of her own making, shoot with the coolness and unerring aim of the most experienced gamekeeper ; declared that croquet was deadly dull, and tennis a mild exhilaration for spoony couples, and found all indoor parlour games a penance. As for dancing—she loved it ; thrilled to the measure of the music ; would have tripped

it with the children in the street whenever a crazy barrel-organ mangled a waltz-tune ; yet never danced —of her own free will never danced—simply because she was her mother's child. "Ah, well, you see ; her mother was a dancing girl!" She anticipated the comment, and pride and shame restrained her.

She was thinking of these things when she left the village behind on this golden summer evening and set her face to the uplands. She had chosen the roughest and steepest road because of all the roads that led to the moors this was the friendliest, the most sympathetic, scorning all circumventions and meanderings—a plain, straightforward road that knew its goal and made for it without hesitation. Nell's heart and lungs were in such good order that she never realised how briskly she had been walking until she reached the top of the ascent and became aware of the loud throb of the engine in her breast.

Other causes, however, besides physical exertion will quicken the action of the heart's machinery, and one of these may have operated now, for her eyes swept the moors as if they sought something more than the natural beauties which require no seeking. Evidently they sought in vain, for they immediately dropped to the dial of the little watch she wore.

"You're fully ten minutes too soon, you ass!" Nell told herself.

That was of small consequence when her soul could refresh itself with the dainties Nature was spreading before her. Accustomed as she was to the prodigal beauty of the moors at this season of the year the splendour of the scene moved her as it had never done before. It was the evening sun that made the difference—the soft golden light that came from the west and spread itself like a rich, diaphanous vapour over the moor's gorgeous colourings and the distant valley's more subdued tints. Even the dark firs in the plantation on the edge of the moor, eastward, had lost their gloom and allowed a smile to cross their dark features as evening tricked them out in amber ; and the moun-

tains, miles away, were no longer aloof and imperial but had drawn nearer to the lowlands, like monarchs who unbend and appear among their subjects in their resplendent robes on some occasion of high state and gala.

" ' Nature is the art of God ' " said a voice in Nell's ear—a low voice that was musical to Nell.

She had been so absorbed in the landscape and her thoughts that she had never heard Tom come, and he had crept forward and seated himself just behind her. She was leaning back against a rock, nursing her knees, and she neither started nor seemed surprised.

" Do you know what I was thinking ? " she said. " ' Every green thing loves to die in bright colours.' That's out of a sermon uncle Roger was reading this afternoon."

Tom laughed. " That's because nature is a woman," he said, " and knows how people may admire her even when she lies dying. So she puts a pretty bed-jacket on and throws a bright, oriental counterpane over the bed, and passes away with a smile on her face because she's so good-looking."

" Oh, chuck it ! " said Nell.

After that there was a great silence. So far as could be seen they had the moor to themselves, yet neither of them spoke. Tom shuffled forward until he was on a level with Nell, and he too bunched his knees and sat looking down into the dale which was as remote as a painted picture. The beauty of the scene was present with him all the time, but his mind was away in the drawing-room at Gapstone Hall, where it had remained ever since the conversation with his mother.

Nell's intuitions told her that something momentous was in the air, but she was so sure of herself and of Tom that she was not disturbed. Only—she felt sorry for him because she knew that the path he had to tread was like the road that led to the moors—rough and difficult. She had put herself in his place, thought his thoughts, fought his battles, over and over again, and knew exactly on what ground to meet him.

"You're reverential enough for a church, Tom," she said at length, and she unclasped her hands and passed an arm through one of his. "Your eyes are wide and solemn and you look careworn, just as you did ever so many years ago when we were both kids and I ran away from aunt Edith and followed you to the moor. You were rather a nice boy even then, Tom."

"In spite of my frowns and reproaches, weighted with the wisdom of fourteen years," he said; and they both laughed.

"I deserved them," she replied. "I was shameless. I'm shocked to think how shameless; but I'm not a bit ashamed."

"Nell," he said in a low earnest voice, "has it all been a mistake? I mean ought we to have allowed ourselves—ought I to have allowed myself or to have allowed you——"

"Dear old Tom," she interrupted, and the pressure of the hand upon his arm increased a little; "don't talk about having allowed me to do anything, because I shouldn't have allowed you to allow me. I'm one of the most independent unconventional women that God ever made, and you'll have that to reckon with whenever you ask me to marry you. You see I quite take it for granted you are going to ask me, and if you don't I shall feel as if the shutters have been closed on my life and every lamp removed."

Tom gasped. "You certainly are unconventional," he said; and though his eyes were dancing there was an undernote of trouble in his voice. "Of course I know you must have read my heart and you've wanted to make it easy for me: you must have known for a long time how much I love you—and yet——"

She pressed his arm even more tightly.

"Of course I've known, you silly boy," she admitted, "or I shouldn't have said what I did just now. And you're not to declare in years to come that I was the first to mention marriage, because your eyes have asked me time and time again and I was only replying to your thoughts. We love each other. If I'm all the world

to you you're all the world to me, so why shouldn't we marry?"

"Because of the difference in our stations," he forced himself to say.

"Because of fiddlesticks!" she replied. "Tom! at this stage, in books, the hero folds the heroine in his arms and there are two rows of asterisks. Perhaps this place is too public."

Tom looked neither to the right nor the left, but drew her face to his and kissed her on the lips, again and again.

"Don't!" she protested after a while. "You'll have my hair down in another minute, and then I shall be in a mess if anyone comes by. We'll assume we've got to the last asterisk, and sit up and talk sense now. Even yet you have scruples, haven't you, old boy?"

He laughed, happily, yet his face confessed that the accusation was true.

"Of course I have," he said. "If you were in my place you would make me listen whilst you voiced them."

"Voice away then!"

She turned ever so slightly and bunched her knees again. She could see his face now—the face that was not only honest and strong, but handsome, too—the face of an artist and a gentleman.

"My father, Nell, was a gardener——"

"I know; so was my venerable ancestor, Adam!"

"Listen to me, Nell. I'm proud of my father and mother; no man living, whatever his rank, has more cause to be prouder of his parents than I. They pinched and scraped for us children; and they watered sacrifice with love and made a song of hardship. They were the happiest people I know, and I reverence my father's memory. However rich I may become—and I don't know, of course, that riches will ever come my way—my greatest treasure will always be the memory of my father and mother's love. That is, apart from yours, of course."

"Of course," echoed Nell, demurely.

"All the same they were very humble folk and very poor. How mother managed I daren't begin to think—and if it hadn't been for your uncle Roger I should have been a gardener, too——"

"If it hadn't been for *me*," Nell corrected. "Don't leave me out of the picture, because if it hadn't been for me uncle Roger would never have known you existed. I'm the little wheel that set the big wheel going. I'm not asking for glory, only for justice."

He drew her to him and kissed her again. "You have always been my good angel," he said.

"Well, then, listen to me whilst *I* do the voicing," she said, "and remember that angels mustn't be interrupted. All that you want to say I've thought about long since, old boy, and the matter's settled. Poor aunt Edith and uncle Jim will be frightfully humiliated when they hear of our engagement, and will wear hair-shirts and mourning under their clothes, and mention my name in hushed voices as if I had dropped a big, black blot on their escutcheon. And it's such a nice, clean, painfully new escutcheon that it does seem a pity to spoil it, and yet the thought only amuses me."

"It doesn't amuse me," said Tom.

"Hush!" said Nell. "I haven't explained yet. I don't believe much in marriages of condescension, and I'm not at all sure that the beggar-maid would find life with old Cophetua to be a bed of roses. I suppose there is a poor governess here and there who lives happily ever after with the noble lord whose heart she captures, or a marchioness who enters paradise when she marries her groom, and doesn't wake up to find it a dream she can't get rid of; but on the whole I'm a sceptic. But I'm not a marchioness and uncle Jim isn't a noble lord. Uncle Jim's father was a factory lad, and his father's father was a hand-loom weaver who carried his piece on his back to market, and lived on porridge and potatoes and thin broth. He couldn't write, and would have called a man like your father 'sir.' So don't you see that disposes of the marchioness difficulty? Your angel's ancestors wore clogs, not coronets."

She laughed triumphantly as she concluded, and Tom laughed, too. "Love's arguments find ready favour, Nell," he said. "I daresay Mr. and Mrs. Roger will give us their blessing; but if your father should ever turn up there would be an awful row, I'm afraid. He'd blame your uncle——"

"And poor uncle Roger would wither like a blighted leaf, of course," Nell broke in. "Don't you see him wilting? But don't worry about uncle Roger, for if dad should turn up, which isn't likely, this child can look after herself. Whom did dad marry and whose leave did he ask? I'm daughter of a dancing-girl who has been divorced by her husband. Sometimes I'm sorry for myself, and inclined to be grateful to the man who'll give me another name. Honestly, I am!"

Her tone had been almost fierce, but it became plaintive towards the end, and in her eyes there was a far-away look that affirmed the sincerity of her words. Tom drew her to him and used all the time-honoured lover's expedients to bring back her smiles, and found the task ridiculously easy.

Slowly the sun sank behind the hills, which threw the shawls of night across their shoulders and leaned back against the sky. The vale, too, lost its golden tints and welcomed the shadows. But the firs were transformed: the amber was washed with rose, splashed with gilt; and the moors, always beautiful at this point because of their various and diverse herbage, shone with warmer, deeper shades of purple and crimson, of russet and golden-brown. A flock of starlings passed like a low, swift cloud overhead, and a moment or two later some wild duck flew past. The two lovers sat hand in hand, awed into silence by beauty that was almost oppressive. By-and-by Tom spoke.

"Nell," he said; "a sight like this thrills me. It makes me conscious of powers that it seems almost presumptuous to claim. I feel I can do great work—that I *must*. It exalts me; so that for a moment I really feel to be on a higher level. I really feel that I may perhaps be able to make you happy."

"Then we'll go home," said Nell, "whilst the fire burns. I *know* you'll do great work; but the man I'm in love with and am going to marry, designs attractive show-cards for B.B. Butterscotch; and if he never does anything more than that it won't make any difference to me, because it's Tom Turner, the man, I'm in love with, and not a possible R.A. Come along! The angel has a healthy appetite, and supper is down below, on the earth."

CHAPTER XXIV

IN WHICH NELL FACES THE MUSIC

"LIFE is sweet, brother!" It was the first thought that came into Nell's mind when the mill's buzzer woke her the next morning; and she sprang into full consciousness at once and lay thinking of the event that had made the previous evening memorable above all other evenings. When the clatter of clogs began, increased and diminished she found it for the first time musical, positively inspiring, like the measures of a military march—or a bridal march.

Her aunt and uncle had been very pleased when she told them what had taken place, though not quite as rapturous and excited as she could have wished. She had called them old sobersides, and uncle Roger's laughing denial had seemed a little forced, yet their congratulations had been unmistakably sincere. No doubt the thought of losing her from their little circle had sobered their enthusiasm. Why, *of course* it had!

The morning was dull and it seemed to have spread its sombre tints over everyone's spirits when she went downstairs. Mercy looked at her and sighed. Mary kissed her affectionately and asked her how she had slept, just as if she had been a guest, freshly risen from a strange bed. Her aunt's own eyes were heavy, and she admitted she had had a poor night. Then uncle Roger came in with a shadow on his good-humoured face, and they sat down to breakfast. It was when

the meal was nearly over that she was told what had happened.

"So that's it, is it?" Nell said. "I wondered why we were all travelling by mourning-coach with such *very* composed faces. And you think dad has come to stop?"

"What else can he do?" replied Roger, who was much relieved to find that Nell took the news philosophically and exhibited no signs of depression. His voice still showed a trace of sternness and there was the suspicion of a frown on his brow. "It'll depend very largely on you and the sort of reception you give him. I'll stand no bullying, and he knows it. If he hadn't looked so ill he'd have had a rougher welcome than he got."

Nell asked many more questions before her uncle returned to the mill, and when he had gone she went upstairs and put on a prettier dress and her hat.

"You're not going so early, dear?" asked Mary, who had followed her.

"If I wait until I want to go I shall never get off," said Nell firmly. "I'm worried about poor Mrs. Turner."

"Your father shall not force you to live with him," said her aunt. "Roger says——"

Nell stopped her with a kiss. "Don't worry, my dear," she replied. "I haven't lived with you two all these years for nothing. Life is always an adventure, and I'm fond of adventures. Keep your pecker up! Mine has only gone down one notch!"

"I've lain awake most of the night," said Mary, "and have crossed a lot of bridges I don't expect I shall ever come to; but you see if your life is to be spoiled——"

"Aunt Mary!" Nell's voice was full of surprised reproach. "What have you done with all your stiffening this morning? I thought 'all things worked together for good' in your philosophy, and that you were one of those who can sing songs in the night."

"I thought I could. Perhaps I could in my own night, but not in yours."

"Well, this isn't my night—it's glorious day: blue sky, golden sunshine, warm breezes. My heart's all green pastures and still waters, and dad's coming is only the weeniest cloud on the horizon, and I'm going up to see if it really is a cloud."

"God bless and speed you, my dear!" said Mary.

Nell did not linger on her way to Gapstone, though there was much to occupy her thoughts, and when she reached the Hall she made her way to the back entrance and found Mrs. Turner in the kitchen, much disturbed and indeed in a state of nervous trepidation. Nell went up to her and kissed her, and tears came into the woman's eyes.

"Oh, Miss Nell! Tom told me everything last night, but he was fairly taken aback when he found your father was here. I've been in a fluster ever since, and I do wish we'd never come, Miss Nell, though it seemed such a godsend when your uncle named it. I'm frightened of your father, and whatever he'll say when he knows, and whatever Sir James and his lady will say, I daren't think. I see nothing for it but leaving here right away——"

Nell laid a reassuring hand on her arm.

"Don't you go fretting yourself to death. We re in the soup, right enough, but nobody is badly scalded so far, and they're not going to be. I've come to stop and we shall have to help each other if the lion roars too loudly. Uncle Jim isn't in the picture—there's only father, and . . . . well, we shall see. But you've got to drop the 'Miss,' you know; now that I'm to be your daughter-in-law."

"I don't know that I shall ever bring my tongue to it, Miss Nell: and as for doing it in front of him, I just couldn't."

"Is he down?" Nell asked.

"Yes, he was down at eight and asking for whiskey. He's hardly touched his breakfast—all his cry is for whiskey and more fuel."

"Now, Mrs. Turner," said Nell firmly: "you've to buck up right away and remember *I'm* here. I'm not

the least bit afraid, and you needn't be. I'll ring up uncle Roger and ask him about the whiskey, and if he thinks he may have some he'll see about it. Now dry your eyes and put a cheerful courage on ! "

Nell kissed the wrinkled brow and went to the little closet where the telephone was located. In a few minutes she returned—

" That's all right. Uncle will send a few bottles up until I succeed in getting dad to wear a blue ribbon. Now here's for it ! "

In spite of her brave words her pulse quickened as she opened the morning-room door, but she never hesitated. By this time the sun was shining feebly and the air was heavy ; yet the windows were closed and a huge fire roared in the wide grate over which her father was bending. He had found an old dressing-gown somewhere and was without coat. The slippers he was wearing were shabby, but comfortable—they had been old favourites of the late Mr. Turner.

" Why the dickens don't you knock ? " he muttered without looking round. Then, as the intruder came up to the hearth, he turned with a gesture of annoyance, and his tone and expression underwent an abrupt change.

" By gad, it's Nell ! " he said, admiringly.

He rose to his feet and received a kiss that had no warmth in it, if no unfriendliness, and then held her from him at arm's length whilst he scanned her features.

" By gad ! What a handsome woman the kid has grown into ! But it isn't the first time I've seen you, my dear—not at all. I saw you when you were playing lady-mayoress to that old pig's bladder with the gold chain on. Beauty and the Beast, my dear ! Beauty and the Beast ! "

Despite the warnings she had received, Nell was shocked by his appearance. He looked so old, so unkempt, so—undesirable. She turned her eyes away from him and proceeded to remove her hat and gloves, whilst he dropped into his chair again.

" I've come to keep house for you, dad, and take

care of you," she made herself say in as cordial a tone as she could muster.

"And a darned good thing, too," he replied. "That piece of soft goods in the kitchen has got something wrong with her tremolo stop, and it raises the devil in me. I must be darned ugly when the very sight of my face sets her shivering."

Nell felt the atmosphere stifling, but seeing her father lean forward again towards the blaze she seated herself in the other easy chair, and met his self-depreciation with a smile.

"Oh, you're not as bad as all that," she said. "I don't think that long beard improves you; otherwise you're like a well-thumbed edition of uncle Jim, if I may put it so, and he rather fancies himself, I can tell you. Your face is more pinched than his——"

"Pinched!" he exclaimed. "I'm cold, Nell; always cold. That's why I drink whiskey, and there isn't a drop in the blessed place. When I get a little warmer I'll go and buy a bottle."

His eyes brightened when he heard that some was coming; but he refused coffee when Nell suggested it—refused it irritably and with an oath for which the next moment he apologised. "Swearing and drinking have become a habit, Nell," he said. "Your uncle Jim would tell you that 'strong drink is raging,' and he'd be right, mind you. It's raged in me like a mad wolf ever since your mother left me—nay, by gad, I'll be fair to her: the cub was in me before, but it grew fast after that, and sharpened its teeth on my sorrows."

He leaned back in his chair now and Nell saw his face harden. It was very grey and haggard, but not really dissipated, and her heart softened.

"I'm sorry, dad," she said softly. "It must have hurt horribly to have to divorce her."

"Divorce her! Who said I divorced her?" he snapped. "Do you think I was such a fool as to play her game? I laughed at her when she suggested it; told her my home was hers—anytime; that the candle would be burning in the window for my little Em'ly

whenever she wanted to come back. I drove her wild, but I never divorced her—no fear ; and I gave her no cause to divorce me ; you bet your soul ! "

He loves her yet, said Nell to herself as she watched the workings of his face. For a time he said no more, but frowned heavily. Then he tossed his head impatiently, and said—

" Nell, never mention your mother's name again if you don't want me to see red. There are times when I'm mad—really mad, I tell you—off my head—those who know me would warn you ; and it's when I think of her and that infernal scamp who stole her from me."

" Yes, he loves her yet," thought Nell again ; but her lips said—

" No, we'll try to forget her, dad."

He looked up sharply, and she met his penetrating gaze without a tremor, whereupon a queer smile curled his lips.

" I guess you re a deep one, Nell, but I suspect every woman now ! There's something I'd better say before we go any further. I quite understand that I've no rights in you, though you're my own daughter, and I admit I've no claim on you of any sort. I bartered you for money years ago ; but I knew you wouldn't mind—nay, by gad, I knew you'd be glad. I'm trying to apologise, you understand, for my neglect and the wrong I've done you, and for springing myself upon you like this. You'd better let me finish for it isn't easy—I'm not one of the meek of the earth like the old girl in the kitchen—and if I'm stopped I shan't start again. I chucked you, Nell, and year after year went by and I scarcely gave you a thought. It was a darned low trick for any father to do, and I'm ashamed of myself—by gad, when I see you sitting there—a girl of whom any father might be proud—I'm ashamed of myself."

" Well," replied Nell steadily, as he paused and looked inquiringly into her eyes, " we'll drop it just there, shall we, and start afresh ? I've loved being with aunt Mary and uncle Roger, so there's no grievance on that

score. If only you had written now and then. But that isn't letting it drop, is it? Tell me why you've come home."

She felt at her ease now after this humble confession, and much more favourably disposed towards her father. That look of something like agony which had seared his face when he had spoken of her mother had touched her heart. But he was a stranger yet, and she was on her guard.

"I came home because a good woman cried shame on me when she knew I had a child," he said. "Nay, don't misunderstand me," he continued with another of his queer smiles, "I'm not in love with her, but her son is; and for some strange reason the lad loves me, and I return his love."

There was no mistaking the softer look that came into his eyes as he spoke. He half twisted his chair to the fire and held out his hands again to the flames, and the glow lit up his face and gave colour to the greyness. He was not looking at Nell now, but she could see how nervously his features responded to his thoughts.

"Tell me, dad," she said.

"Aye," he said, "I'll tell you, for ever since I saw you on that platform in the park—saw how beautiful you've grown—I've been dreaming dreams. I couldn't stay in the wilderness with that Scotch Presbyterian Roger engaged, Nell. He's as straight a fellow as ever walked, Mathieson is; but when Rosie pushed me into the ditch he fed me on Scripture and Thomas Carlyle until I choked. I left him, but I suppose he tracked me, somehow, for I've always had remittances. That's what your dad, your proud dad, came to be, Nell—a remittance man, dependent on a half-brother, until I found another friend and slipped the Scotsman.

"A young Canadian fell in with me one day—a youngster who had come out west to try to forget a girl who'd jilted him, and the 'one touch of nature' made the two of us kin, I suppose. He had heaps of money and he was a good friend to me, and I daresay I did him a bit of good. Anyhow, his wound healed.

and then one morning our boat overturned in the rapids, and to this day he makes no end of a fuss because I gave him a helping hand and saved him from becoming a confirmed water-drinker.

"His escape sickened him of adventure, and he persuaded me to go back to Ottawa with him. I didn't want to, but I liked the lad, and he wouldn't leave me to the only other friend I had—the darned hot stuff they call whiskey over there. His mother, Nell, is one of the sweetest women you ever met—genuine stuff to the last drop of her blood, and blue blood at that. There are just the two of them, and they roll in money and are thought no end of in the city, yet don't know the meaning of side.

"Well, the mother was shocked when she knew what I'd done with my child, and what I hadn't done, and the two of them rubbed it in pretty thick—gently, you know, but persistently. Then I got acquainted with a fellow whose people are Keeley folk, and he told me Jim had been made a baronet, and hunted up an old copy of the *News* which had his portrait in and a full account. That got my goat, I can tell you. I pictured him and his kids swanking it over my girl, and I was mad—off my head altogether.

"Then Raymond's mother tackled me. 'Get back home,' she said, 'and let it *be* home. Your little lassie will help you to turn over a new leaf.' Gad! we'd both forgotten that the little lassie would be a woman by this time. And then Raymond chipped in 'Aye, that's the ticket, dad' (he had always called me 'dad' out west) 'You get along home, and mother and I will run over and see you in a month or two and make the acquaintance of the kid!'"

"The kid will be very glad to see them, dad," said Nell.

"I wasn't very keen, I may tell you. The part of the prodigal son wasn't just to my liking, and the thought of coming back beggared and disgraced to my prosperous relatives didn't put much vim into me. I drank a lot of whiskey before I made my mind up and

I'd some bad half-hours on the boat. I tell you I'm mad, stark mad, at times. Then when I saw you on that platform it came over me all at once that there was a chance to get level with your uncle Jim and give you your proper place in the world."

He paused and turned his chair again so that he might see his daughter's face. She smiled as her eyes met his but made no comment.

"Nell, that boy, Raymond, is one of the straightest, whitest men God ever made. His father died years ago, but he was one of Canada's best, and his wife matched him. I've thought of nothing but you and the lad these last two days—and I've got it into my head that it's a cert. The boy has only to see you, Nell, and the thing's done——"

Nell had an impulse to laugh, but the look on her father's face—the look of earnestness, of appeal—almost of triumph—checked her, yet she felt she must interrupt him; and she said soberly, but with a sympathetic smile,

"You're too late, dad. I'm sure your Raymond is an awfully nice boy and I'm prepared to be very fond of him; but your dream can't be realised because, you see, I'm engaged already."

At once her father's eyes lost their brightness, as if a film had spread over them. He leaned back in his chair and said dully,

"You're engaged already! That's the very devil! To whom are you engaged?"

"To one of the straightest, whitest men God ever made," Nell answered without a smile; "but you'll have to hold your breath and grip the arms of your chair when I tell you who he is. Poor old dad! I'm sorry to disappoint you, but you see whilst you've been dreaming dreams I've been seeing visions."

"Who is he?" he asked huskily—impatiently.

"His name is Tom Turner; he's the son of the woman you call the 'soft goods in the kitchen,'" she replied firmly, though her heart beat more quickly,

"You darned fool!" he shouted. The film cleared

from his eyes which now sparkled with the glitter of steel, and his furrowed brow and tightened lips served to shew the extent of his anger. "You'll marry the son of your uncle Jim's gardener! You've no more pride about you than to sink as low as that! I'd see you in your grave first!"

Nell's face was white now, but she was not angry. She was really sorry for her father and calm enough to understand his feelings.

"Listen, dad!" she said.

"Listen!" he broke in. "I'll listen if you tell me it's all a lie; but I won't listen to any such darned nonsense as you're telling me——!"

"Listen!" she repeated firmly. "Tom Turner is a gentleman. So was his father, in everything except social position. We've loved each other ever since we were children, and last night I promised to marry him—"

"Last night?"

"He isn't well off, but that doesn't matter. He has a good income, and is becoming known as an artist; and in any case I have enough and to spare, thanks to uncle Roger."

"Aye," her father broke in again. "You're right. It's all thanks to uncle Roger—all! I might have known what would happen when I left you in their charge—common folk without ambition and proper pride; with the outlook of their own millhands, and content to live in a stye like pigs. I always hated them, and I hate them more than ever now!"

There are deep pools among the mountains whose surface is never rippled though wild gales sweep over them, and Nell at this moment was like one of these. She looked her father firmly in the face, and said—

"You are mad when you talk like that, and you forget what you owe uncle Roger. *I* don't. When I went there from uncle Jim's after you forsook me, I exchanged the North Pole for the tropics. I found there the only real love I had ever known. Common folk! So they are—common as Jesus Christ was, with hearts like His, big enough to help the fallen and shelter the outcast—

you know that—yes, and to love and sympathise where there is no return. I am proud of them! I make them my boast! Apart from them—and Tom—I haven't much to be proud of."

Her father stared at her and was speechless. She had grown warmer as she proceeded, but her indignation never became hot, and her voice contained a note of sadness as she ended that reached the man's heart. She brightened immediately, however.

"You mustn't judge Tom until you see him, and you mustn't mope because your dream is only a dream. These Raymonds are rich, high-born, you say?"

"You don't know what wealth means," he replied surlily. "They would think your uncle Jim poor."

"And they would be right," she replied; "he *is* poor—miserably poor: a woman like your Mrs. Raymond would see at once how poor he is. Her blue blood would run thin at the sight of him. And when she found out what sort of grandfathers this girl had whom you wanted her son to marry—that the one went to work in clogs before daybreak, and the other was an attendant at a stage door—are you sure she would be very eager to welcome her?"

"She'd hold out both hands to you," he said. "If her boy fell in love with you she would take you to her heart. Love makes condescension easy."

"It does," Nell agreed, meaningly.

"I have neither right nor authority over you,' he said dejectedly. "One by one the dreams of my life have been shattered. All my days I've been a disappointed man. I thought your mother cared for me and would make me happy—*that* was a dream. I thought money would buy happiness, and I spent it freely—*that* was a dream. Life has been nothing else but dreams and disappointed awakenings. There's nothing left but whiskey and that's a dream, too, but a better dream than the others."

"It's the biggest illusion of all," said Nell, "it's a false friend: it goes on promising what it can't perform! Do you know, dad, I think you may be happy yet, but

you'll have to go uncle Roger's road. He's always thinking how to make other folk happy ; and he fills his own can out of their overflow. Now I must see what Mrs. Turner is doing about dinner."

"See if that darned whiskey has come," he said and even after that she bent and kissed his forehead.

CHAPTER XXV

IN WHICH BETTY BINNS LOOKS BACKWARD

THE clock in the central tower of " The Three B's " struck the hour of twelve, and streams of men and women, converging on the great dining hall which had been provided for the use of those whose homes were at a distance, disturbed the air with tumultuous sounds. It was no mere eating-room : no place of long trestle-tables and equally long benches arranged in parallel lines like companies of soldiers on a parade-ground, yet there was orderliness in the scheme, and the fleet-footed waitresses moved easily between the scores of small tables scattered over the extent of the hall, and had their own regular customers just as if they had been waitresses in a town restaurant.

There was a platform at one end of the room where music was occasionally dispensed, but which more often served as a pulpit from which Mr. Samuel Binns (" His Nibs " was the more customary designation) unburdened himself at intervals when announcements affecting the business were considered necessary. These occasions were anticipated with much enjoyment by the employees who were invariably put into merry mood by Sam's carefully polished periods and pompous delivery, for His Nibs' weakness offended nobody, seeing that, as they put it, " If his head's a bit swelled his heart's in t' right place."

On this occasion there was neither music nor "speechifying" and men and women applied themselves undisturbed to the agreeable task of dining. Three men, seated at a table near the door, discussed the absence of entertainment as they plied their knives and forks.

"I thowt we were to have a few words from His Worship this noon-time," remarked No. 1. (Since Sam's accession to office "His Worship" had provided an acceptable variant.)

"They say his mother's badly," said No. 2. "She'll be getting on, will Betty. She was an old woman when I was a lad."

"She's same age as my mother," explained No. 3. "They were lasses together. She's going in eighty-three, Betty is. Sam's my age within a month or two."

"And that'll be climbing up to sixty, Ben," said No. 1.

"It is that, lad. Nobbut two year short!"

"He'll take it badly, will His Nibs, I fancy, when aught happens t' old lady," said No. 2, reflectively. "He's a rare 'un for looking after his mother."

"Aye, and she's a rare 'un for looking after him," returned No. 3. "You lads know naught about it, but there'd ha' been no 'Three Bs' but for her; and if you ask me what 'Three B's' stands for I'll tell you—'Betty, Brains and Bounce,' and i' that order."

"And 'Brains' isn't Sam, I'm thinking," said No. 1, humorously. "'Bounce' 'll fit him better."

"You're right, lad; 'Brag's a good dog, but Holdfast is a better'; and there wouldn't ha' been much 'Three B's' if this chap that's just come in hadn't had a finger in t' pie."

His companions turned their eyes in the direction of the door, and the concentrated gaze of the three men must have attracted Roger's attention, for he walked up to their table and took the vacant chair.

"Now, lads!" he said to the two younger men by way of greeting; and picking up the menu, addressed the older one more intimately.

"Well, Ben, what do you recommend, like?"

"This steak and kidney pie ails nowt," replied the other; and Roger gave the smiling waitress his order.

"They tell me the boss isn't down this morning," said Roger, and Ben nodded, "So they say," he added.

"It's his mother that's out o' sorts," said No. 2, and Roger looked up sharply and his voice lost its note of indifference.

"What's that, Isaac?"

"T' doctor's been going this last day or two, and I heard tell he wasn't so well satisfied wi' her."

Roger said nothing more but turned to other topics, and he had finished his meal before the others were half through their pudding. A shilling covered the entire cost, and this he paid and rose. "Good-day, lads," he said.

"I'll bet anybody a crown I know where *he's* off to," said Ben. "He thinks the world o' Betty."

"It caps me," said No. 2, "'at His Nibs can live in a big house like yon and Roger's naught but a bit of a villa."

"Aye," replied Ben sardonically, "'Brag's a dog 'at likes a big kennel, you see."

Sam's car was at the door when Roger reached the house, and Sam himself was talking seriously to one of the maids in the hall. He turned gloomily and led the way into the drawing-room.

"I'm down about her, Roger. She's no real disease: it's just that she gets weaker and weaker. The doctor says she may pick up in a day or two, but he doesn't speak very confidently, and I'm worried. There's an important committee meeting at the Town Hall I must attend, and she won't hear of me missing it. Roger, she's slipping away from us."

His voice was husky and Roger tried to encourage him.

"Cheer up, Sam; and don't put her in her coffin before she's dead!"

All the same his own heart sank when he saw her. Her gentle voice bade him enter when he knocked, and

he was surprised to find her sitting in a cosy chair beside the window which was opened wide. She looked very frail and shrunken, and her face was the colour of ivory with just a faint, a very faint flush of pink on the cheeks. Perhaps the strong sunlight made her seem paler, more waxen, than she was ; but Roger was startled if he did not allow his voice to show it.

" Now then," he said, as he stooped and kissed her cheek ; " what's the game you're playing now, Betty ? "

She smiled happily and held his hand.

" The last game before I go home, love," she said. " They're calling 'all in, all in ! ' like they used to do on a summer's evening when I was a little lass, and I shan't have to delay much longer."

" Why then," said Roger, " we'll just sit and talk about it a bit, shall we ? " and he drew forward a chair and sat beside her with one of his hands clasped in hers.

" Did you see Sam, love ? " she asked.

" Yes," he replied, " poor Sam is in the pit to-day. You've been telling him, I suppose."

She shook her head. " Nay, I can tell you what I can't tell him. He's one of them the Master spoke to : ' I have many things to say but ye are not able to bear it.' I wish Sam had married, love."

" Aye, but you see you've done too well for Sam—spoiled him for other women."

" I've been a selfish old woman," she replied, but a smile rested on her face as she said it. " I wouldn't have stood in the way of his marrying, but I was glad to have him with me ; and it's been a mistake, Roger. He'll be lost when I'm gone."

" Aye, we all shall," said Roger feelingly. " But now look here, Betty ! Don't you fret about Sam. You found him the grandest wife he ever dreamed of —aye, and the sweetest, for she's made of sugar and treacle—when you set him up in business ; and she's been as faithful to him as he's been loyal to her ; and they'll stick together till death them do part, there's no question o' that. Of course, if he'd his way he'd keep you here till he goes himself ; but barring that he

can't do that, there isn't a happier man in England than Sam."

"Then there ought to be," she replied. "There ought to be *one* happier, Roger."

He could not mistake the meaning in her eyes and he smiled and pressed the hand that lay beneath his own.

"Well, I don't know that it would be good for a fellow to be any happier than I am," he said. "What else can he be when he's all he wants, and a deal more than he either needs or deserves. Life's been a good game, Betty; and when the time comes that they call *me* in I reckon I oughtn't to grumble."

"I hope it 'll be long years before you hear them calling, love," she said, "and there's hundreds besides me 'll pray for that. God bless you, Roger! I'm proud of Sam; but I'm more than proud of you—I can't find a word for it, but I praise God for you every day of my life——"

"Nay, come now!" said Roger; and she merely smiled at the protest and went on,

"It isn't just as though it had been only Sam and me—why, you give everybody a lift that has more than they can carry. But I'll say no more about that because it's true what it says in the Book: 'He that loseth his life, saves it.' What I'm wanting to tell you is something different. Move my chair round a bit, love, will you?"

He wheeled it about, so that her back was now to the window, and her eyes wandered slowly round the room.

"It's a lovely bedroom, isn't it?" she almost whispered; and Roger replied heartily—"It is that!"

It was a moderately large room, tastefully furnished in substantial mahogany, with a pretty carpet and pretty curtains. Everything was modern except the bed, which was built on old-fashioned, massive lines with a heavy canopy and upholstered head-board. It had belonged to Betty's grandfather and was greatly treasured.

But on the old-fashioned bed there was a modern bed-spread, and a satin eiderdown of rich warm tints

that toned with the hangings and the carpet and the cretonne curtains and chair-covers. There were good, neatly-framed prints on the walls ; and a new portrait of Sam in his mayoral robes and chain of office was suspended above the mantelpiece. Everything was choice, dainty, pleasing, and beautifully clean.

"I can hardly think it's all come out of butterscotch," said Betty, still in a whisper ; "but then it hasn't : it's come out of your money and your head."

"It's come out of your old frying-pan," said Roger.

"Do you know, love," she went on, more firmly now, and with a twinkle in her eyes that brought back to Roger the memory of old times, "I'm going to make a confession, and I wouldn't have Sam know for anything. There are times when I pine for my old home at Carr Bottom—aye, when my heart fair aches for it. You remember the bedroom, don't you ? It had oilcloth and a bit of druggeting on the floor, and there was a painted dressing-table and chest of drawers. The staircase was that narrow and twisted you might easy have broken your neck if you'd slipped, and the living-room was no better than any o' the neighbours', to say nothing of it being made into a sort of a shop. It was a poorish spot when you come to think about it, but the happiest hours of my life were spent there."

She paused, and Roger did not interrupt her. He sat with closed eyes now, his legs outstretched and his hands clasped behind his head.

"It's come over me many a time this last twelve months, when I've felt myself getting weaker and couldn't stir about so well, that if I'd been down at Carr Bottom first one neighbour and then another would have been popping in to sit with me a while and pass on a bit o' gossip and let me share their joys and sorrows. And children would have put their heads in at the door and shouted, 'Now, Betty !' and young women 'ud have brought their babies for me to praise 'em. There'd have been something fresh every day, and a chance to be a bit of use to one and another. These

folk who come here in their motor-cars are very kind but—eh, Roger! I was too old and well-rooted in a cottage garden to be planted among all the grand flowers in a greenhouse."

"I know what you mean, Betty," said Roger; but he kept his eyes closed.

"You mustn't take a wrong meaning, love," she went on. "I'm right glad for Sam's sake, and I haven't been unhappy, you know—I'm not regretting that we did it—and if we had our time over again and you gave us the same chance I'd do it just the same, because Sam was always my first thought; and just look what it's done for him!"

A smile crossed Roger's face, and he opened his eyes and saw a mischievous light in Betty's.

"You'll promise never to let him know and I'll tell you a secret, Roger. Time and time again when he's been out, and the maids have been at the pictures I've gone down of a night and sat with Jennie in the kitchen. She's more my sort than the other two and she's known me all her life. Well I remember when she'd come in with her ha'penny before she could talk plain, and say 'Bu'scotch, please!' and so I've never had no 'casion to pretend to be a grand lady, with Jennie; and if I'd been own kin to her she couldn't have treated me better. Her and me have spent dozens of happy hours in the kitchen, Roger.

"Well, I was going to tell you. One night I said to her, 'Jennie, let us make a bit o' butterscotch in the old way'; and you'd have laughed to see us with our white aprons on bending over the pan, and frightened out of our wits 'at Sam would come and catch us. Eh, I don't know when I enjoyed myself so much!"

She laughed quietly to herself and Roger watched her. His eyes were moist and there was a lump in his throat; but there was gladness as well as sorrow in his heart, for death held no terrors for the old woman, and in that cheerful room the grim messenger's face was almost pleasant.

"You're talking a deal, Betty," he said. "I wouldn't like you to overdo it."

"I shall have a long rest," she said quietly. "Let an old woman have her say."

He did not oppose her, and after a brief interval she went on,

"I told Sam who his father was last night. Poor lad, it grieved him sorely, for he'd been proud to think you and he were brothers; and to find you were naught akin was a big disappointment. 'You're nearer to Sir James and Mr. George,' I told him, and he didn't like it."

"Betty!" said Roger, "George has come home. He's up at Gapstone."

"Yes?" she said, with quick interest, and a question in her tone.

"Stony broke!" Roger replied to the look and the voice. "He's ploughed a deal of rough land, Betty, and raised a crop of stones, I fancy. I'm sorry for George—and I'm sorry for Nell."

"And I'm sorry for James, love," she replied. "Those lads would have been happier in clogs, I sometimes think, but who knows? Happiness is a plant that 'll grow in any soil that's watered by love and service, but withers in the hot sun of selfishness. Roger, I could have liked to see Mary and Nell."

She shewed signs of weariness and Roger rose.

"They shall come to-morrow," he said, "and now I'll send Jennie up, and get a move on myself. I've stayed over long already."

He bent down and she took his face between her hands and kissed him affectionately.

"Good-bye, my dear lad!" she said.

"Nay, we won't put it that way," he said as he returned the kiss. "I'll be round again to-morrow."

Her eyes followed him to the door, and her voice summoned him to her side again. She took both his hands in hers, and with gentle pressure drew his face down and kissed him twice.

"One for each of them!" she said. "God bless and reward you, Roger!"

CHAPTER XXVI

IN WHICH GEORGE AND JAMES SPEAK THEIR MINDS

GEORGE turned in at the gates of Carr Hall and walked leisurely up the drive towards the house. He had dressed himself with some care and had surveyed himself in the glass before leaving home with cynical eyes in which there was a measure of amusement; but if there was humour in the set of his face when the grey building came in sight it was of the sardonic order. No detail of the well-kept border escaped his eye. It was much trimmer, much more pleasing than it had been in the old days. It had a colour scheme which had been well thought out and which told that an artist had been at work. It was an approach which was calculated to give character to the house and its owner: which would lead a visitor to conclude that the occupant was a man of culture as well as wealth—at any rate a man of fine taste; for how was a stranger to know that neither the baronet nor his wife ever concerned themselves with these things? Why should they, when they paid a competent man two pounds a week to concern himself in their stead?

There were other evidences of a new and advanced order when a butler opened the door and ushered George into what had been in his father's time a somewhat bare hall, but was now a lounge, comfortably and expensively furnished. There were two statues in it of a classical character which brought a smile to George's

face because they betrayed an influence which must have proved stronger than his brother's puritanism. The butler, on the other hand, was not a surprise. He was a meek, deferential, thin little man, with a funereal expression, who gave no sign of interest, much less of astonishment, when he took the visitor's name. George tossed his hat on to one of the couches, and when the butler opened the drawing-room passed in front of him and stifled the announcement on the scandalised servant's lips.

It was evening, and dinner not long over. James was nodding over a late edition of the *Post*, and Edie and their young daughter were engaged on a table game of some sort in one of the window recesses. All three looked up when George closed the door rather noisily by leaning his back against it.

James drew himself erect in his chair and frowned inquiringly and with some disconcertion on the bearded intruder, and the others were obviously alarmed. The uncertainty was, however, of short duration, for George laughed, and only the child failed to recognise him.

"Rather sudden, isn't it?" George asked; "but I see I need no introduction except to my niece. I needn't ask if she is my niece, Edie, for although I didn't know I had one she bears your imprint too plainly to be mistaken. How are you, my dear? You didn't know, perhaps, that you had a profligate, cow-boy uncle, 'way out West?"

The cynicism was unintentional. George had quite meant to be on his best behaviour; but the first sight of his brother's face raised the devil in him.

"It is your uncle George," Edie explained; and the girl shyly shook hands; and then, catching her father's eye, ran out of the room. George held the door open for her, and turning to his brother, remarked grimly as he closed it.

"A case of highly-contagious moral small-pox, I suppose. I should have thought your youngsters were inoculated and fever-proof by this time, Jim. Hang

it all, man! have you added a deaf and dumb spirit to your other possessions?"

James was recovering himself. The shock of his brother's entrance had indeed stopped his breath, but when he now spoke there was no trace of disturbance.

"Sit down, George. Edie and I are not accustomed to these unceremonious—invasions; and when a man changes his appearance as you have done and rises from the dead, as one may say, we are naturally startled."

"You've left off your mourning, I'm glad to see," said George cynically, with a glance at his sister-in law's gown of soft, golden-brown silk; "but I'll attribute the coolness of my reception to jumpy nerves and let it pass at that. You're looking well, Edie. I can't say the same for Jim."

Edie smiled. She was now perfectly self-possessed and as cordial as she ever allowed herself to be. She replied easily to her brother-in-law's remarks, explaining that she always enjoyed good health and that James's liver was still troublesome. James smiled and sighed, and the double action conveyed its significance to George, who had fortified himself with more whiskey than he should have done.

"You've the same speaking eyes you always had, Jim," he said. "With eyes like them and a tin mug round your neck you'd have made a fortune as a street beggar. 'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth!' —that's what you mean, isn't it?"

"I'm sorry to see that you also are still the same," James replied sternly. "If Edie and I were prepared to welcome you, you make it impossible for us to do so; and you leave me no alternative but to ask you to tell me if you have sought me out with any other purpose than that of insulting me. If so, let me beg you to make it known so that the interview, which cannot be agreeable to either party, may be brought to an end as soon as possible."

George listened to his brother, as the words flowed as smoothly and deliberately as from the lips of a judge, and had the grace to be ashamed of himself.

"I'm sorry, old chap," he said. "I'd no idea of ragging you when I came down; but if you've got a rotten liver I've got a worse, and it makes me jaundiced at times—and spills a drop of bile on my tongue. I meant to be as tame as a pet rabbit—I swear I did—but when a fellow's been living alone in the backwoods for years on end there's more ape and tiger in him than rabbit."

James remained silent. He was heartily wishing that his brother was still living in the backwoods, or better still that he was *not* living there——It was a thought that he knew to be wrong; but he dwelt on it whilst his wife engaged George in polite conversation, steering clear of dangerous subjects, but showing a reasonable interest in her brother-in-law's adventures—and intentions. When there came a pause George turned to his brother.

"I've had a rough life, Jim, as you've been hearing, and I've had my own troubles. When I left the States I thought I should soon be back there—it didn't seem possible that I should ever settle on this side. But now that I've seen Nell I've changed my mind, and for her sake I'm prepared to eat humble pie. That's why I've walked across. I've lain awake all night thinking things over and I'd like to get back to the mill. I'm used to hard work—I've worked like a nigger these last ten years—and I'd like to get back to the old place. Is there any chance?"

The colour mounted his cheeks as he put the question, but James's expression underwent no change, and his voice was in no way warmer when he looked his brother in the eyes and replied:

"None whatever, George. I take little active part in the business myself, now, and every post is filled."

"I could bring a bit of money in, Jim," George continued. He would not look at his brother lest the embers of his irritation should become hot again.

James smiled. "We are not short of capital, George. If I were to say that God had prospered me you would only be amused, so I will say that the firm has done

quite well in recent years, and if more capital were required, I could easily supply it myself. But now let me speak quite frankly and put a simple question to you: there is another member of the family who has had your confidence and the care and upbringing of your child—why don't you appeal to him? Has that fountain run dry that you now turn to me?"

"I'll tell you why," replied George, in a low, intense voice. "It's because there's something about the chap that I can't stand. I fed out of his spoon for years, and he has never said a word to remind me that I'm in his debt or under an obligation to him; and he's never even looked a reminder at me. You wouldn't know from his manner that he'd ever gone a yard out of his way to help me, and yet, besides all he's done for Nell, he's spent thousands on me—thousands, I tell you. I'm up to the neck in his debt, and if I was to ask him, he'd find me a job to-morrow, and a good job. How is it I don't ask him, then? It's because something has happened that he's encouraged, and I can't stomach. I'm like you, Jim—I hate the chap. The only difference between you and me is that I own to it, and you don't. And that's why I come to you and say, 'Find me a job, Jim, for old time's sake, and don't force me on to Roger again.'"

"I shall be misunderstood," replied James sadly, "when I say that you shock me, but I am shocked. My religion forbids hate, and I don't hate Roger—I am merely indifferent. He and his go their way: I and mine go ours. Yet that *you* should hate him—*you* who have been willing to eat out of his hand, as you say—who have allowed him full control of your child, with the result that she is brought to their level, and is about to unite herself (if report speak truly) to the son of a working-man, my late gardener—is surprising and, shall I say, distressing?"

"That's just where it is," said George hotly. "She *is* going to marry this young fellow—she told me so herself, and glories in it. Can't you see for yourself

that I'm darned sorry I ever let them have her, and that I'll die in the ditch before I'll be under any further obligation to the fellow! Now, come, Jim, lend me a hand and——"

"No, George," James broke in; "the Book you despise tells us that if a man sows the wind he reaps the whirlwind, and nothing I can do now will prevent that harvest. If you have a small capital, my advice to you would be to husband it, and live somewhere where life is simple and your resources would serve your time——"

"My dear," said Edie, "if you are going to discuss business matters, I will leave you. I think perhaps you might be able to discover some way by which George could be helped and his self-respect saved ——"

"Thank you for those words, Edie," said George in a hard, strange voice that was quite unlike his own, "and please don't go, because if you do I may forget myself as I did once before. I won't keep you long, for I see that I've wasted my time, and that I was a fool to come at all. You know Jim as well as I do—better. Look at him! Do you see that face! Do you think there's an atom of sympathy or friendliness in it? Do you think if I went on my knees to him and pleaded till midnight I should move him an inch? You know I never should. It's his damned creed that when a man makes his bed he must lie on it, and he'd burn every bed he has sooner than give one to a poor devil who'd grieved him. It pleases him to see me down and out, but it doesn't please him for me to be seen begging on his doorstep, so he recommends the simple life back in the West. Do you think he cares who Nell marries? I tell you he'd be glad to think she was going to marry the sweep if only it could be done without anybody knowing she was Sir James Laycock's niece. That's where the rub comes! That's the sore place! This beggar man, Sir James Laycock's brother! That gardener's wife, Sir James Laycock's niece! It's Sir James he thinks of, morning, noon

and night! It's Sir James and his reputation he's concerned about!—the damned whited sepulchre!"

The faces of all three were very white; but James strove hard to look stern and unconcerned; and his wife watched him with troubled eyes. Her heart was beating riotously. She prayed that no servant might be in the hall to overhear the heated words.

"I said just now I hated Roger!" George went on. "It's a lie! I try to hate him, and I can't! It humiliates me to remember how we treated him, how we scorned him, and how we have had to eat our words, and yet he's never reproached us—never done us anything but kindness. He's worth a thousand wasters like me, or a slimy worm like you, who are wriggling in your chair, and who don't know the meaning of happiness. Roger's a good man—genuine stuff—and everybody knows it; and you——"

He rose as he spoke, and went and stood over his brother, with his hands thrust deep into his pocket, as if to keep them under restraint——

"You! Is there a soul on earth cares whether you live or die, unless it's your wife and children, and even they see through you, and know you're shoddy! Shoddy! Nay, shoddy's right enough in its way; but where are you right?—a miserable, painted imitation of a gentleman who has to label himself Christian, and deceives nobody but himself! I'd tell you to go to the devil, if he hadn't got you already!"

Thereupon, and without looking again at either of his auditors, he strode from the room, picked up his hat from the couch, and let himself out.

Edie held one hand to her heart and put her handkerchief to her eyes. "He's a perfectly awful man!" she gasped.

James was still painfully white, and there was no pretence in the deep dejection that showed in his eyes.

"I daresay he'd been drinking," he said; and his voice was so low that his wife had to strain her ears to catch the words. "But what he said, Edie, was

true—much of it, at any rate. I *am* unhappy. All my honours are just so much Dead Sea fruit. I never have been happy. It has always seemed to me that happiness lay just round the corner, but when I get there, it's as far off as ever."

"But why?" Edie asked. She had accepted her husband's code without ever questioning or quite understanding it. Life gave her all she asked, and therefore satisfied her, because her wants were few. Her husband had always been kind to her, denying her nothing she asked and giving her an assured place in society, which stood for her as the ante-chamber of heaven. Her children were as affectionate and as little troublesome as most people's. The moodiness which made James so silent at times she set down to religious feeling, and was rather comforted by it. It had never occurred to her that the religion was Pharisaism—hypocrisy, yet George's hot words had moved her strangely. It was as if a curtain had been rudely torn from a hitherto darkened window, and her mind was timidly groping round, wondering what revelations the light would make.

"But why?" she asked. "I am sure you ought to be happy!"

"Ought I? George knows better. I deserve to be unhappy. You remember Saul's bitterness when he heard the people sing David's praises! Mine is that story over again. Oh, Edie, if I could see Roger brought low, humbled, made to cringe before his creditors, ruined hopelessly—it would be the happiest day of my life!"

"James!" she exclaimed, startled out of her customary placidity by the intensity of his speech and the bright glitter in his eyes; "you are not yourself! You are not well! What harm has Roger done you, and why should you wish him to be humbled? Surely, his position is humble enough already; and even if he is well-to-do——"

"If!" he interrupted. "If, do you say? Roger is one of the richest men in Yorkshire, and could have

been richer still if he had not been so anxious to make other people rich. He is a genius, a magician. And George is right—I hate him. I hate him because he has falsified all my predictions; he has beaten me on my own ground—beaten me hands down. And I hate him because he is loved where I am disliked, and happy where I am miserable."

"James! James!" said the unhappy woman; "you don't know what you are saying! You are not yourself! Only a few minutes ago you told George he was wrong: that you felt nothing but indifference towards Roger. Your brother has unnerved you! You are speaking wildly!"

"I lied, Edie!" her husband replied with the same moving calmness. "I'm tearing down the mask for you to see me as I am. I lied, I say! I have always hated Roger, and to-day I hate him more than I ever did. And he would be sorry for me if he knew—no pretence about it—genuinely sorry. Roger sorry for *me!* Roger in his twopenny-halfpenny villa sorry for *me!* It stabs me, tears me, like a knife that turns in the wound it has made! And who cares for me? 'Is there a soul on earth,' George said, 'cares whether you live or die?' There isn't, Edie; there isn't one! Good God, why shouldn't I die?"

She went over to him then, the wife who never showed emotion, and knelt on the floor beside his chair, and drew down his head and kissed his lips.

"*I* care, James!" she said, and he felt her cheek wet against his.

He put an arm about her and held her to him. "Yes," he said, "I may thank God for that—*you* care. Perhaps Ethel would miss me—a little; I'm not so sure about the boys. Is there anyone else? Can you think of one other who would be sorry to hear that I was gone?"

She was silent, weeping quietly, with no faintest idea how to comfort or answer him.

"I said one true thing to George," he continued after a long pause. "He who sows the wind reaps the whirlwind."

CHAPTER XXVII

IN WHICH GEORGE SEES RED

THE furious storm of George's anger was very quickly succeeded by a mood of deep depression, to which he abandoned himself as a strong swimmer may yield at last to the whirlpool after an exhausting struggle with the current that has swept him there. He was hot with anger, yet he shivered with cold as he walked along, his hands clasped behind his back, and his eyes fixed on the road, reconstructing the scenes of the last half hour. Angry as he was with his brother, he was still more angry with himself. Had he forgotten his brother's character? Had he imagined that the Ethiopian could change his skin? What hope could there have ever been that his brother would find him a place in the mill? What purpose would have been served if he had? He must have been mad, mad, to have exposed himself to Jim's pietistical scorn; to have abased himself before Jim's wife; to have asked for the rebuff he was certain to receive! Mad! there was no other explanation.

His thoughts turned to Roger as to the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, but his reflections brought no exhilaration; seemed, rather, to darken the shadows, even though he knew that he would find rest and sympathy there. He was spent with life's journey; he was beaten with life's buffetings—a wreck, a failure,

a by-word—and he grudged the rock its strength, its uprightness, its stability, even though he was driven to seek its protection. He was young—not yet forty-five—and life had seemed very fair and full of promise—whose fault was it that he had been driven like the scapegoat to die in the wilderness? Was it his own, or Rosie's, or just the decree of Fate?

He was stiff with cold. His teeth chattered; his lips were blue. When he reached Gapstone he was trembling from head to foot, and could scarcely hold the bottle when he poured the whiskey into the tumbler. It was a stiff dose, and he drank it neat.

The warmth steadied him, and he rang for Mrs. Turner. Miss Nell had not returned? Still at Betty Binns' funeral, was she? Oh, maybe, at Mr. Roger's? He would go and see. What was the woman waiting for, and why did she look at him with such frightened eyes? Go away, woman! Go away, I tell you!

He was ever so much better now—warmer, more in love with himself. He would walk down to Roger's and bring Nell home. He would tell them all what a warm reception Jim had given him. Damn Jim! Who cared a tinker's curse what Jim did or didn't do!

Two pairs of eyes watched him go down the drive; and interpreting the look on his mother's face, Tom Turner followed him—like Peter, "afar off." George walked more firmly and more quickly now. When he reached the "Spotted Ox," he hesitated for a moment. There would be no spirits at The Sycamores, and one more drink like that which had bucked him up so nicely at home would give him a better heart, give him self-respect and self-assurance. He had never been in the inn before, but he entered now; and Tom Turner, seated on the bench beyond the stream, noted that twenty minutes elapsed before he came out again, and turned in at the gate of The Sycamores. It was dusk now and there were no lights in the dining-room, so Tom was sure that Roger and Mary had not returned; but after a short parley with Mercy

at the door, George was admitted, and a light appeared in the dining-room, where Mercy drew the blind.

A heap of shavings and wood filled the grate, and Mercy struck a match and set them ablaze. Her eyes were in her head, and she had noted the man's condition.

"That's a darned good name they gave you—Mercy," said George approvingly. "'Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life'—eh? More than they've done for me, anyhow."

"They follow those who make friends of 'em," said Mercy dryly. "I lit the fire because you look starved," she added; "and I'll be glad to make you a cup of hot coffee, if you'll let me. I've been expecting Mary and Roger back every minute this last hour or more, but there's no need to wait for them before getting you a sup of something hot."

"Something hot!" George repeated the words as if he had scarcely grasped their significance. "Yes, yes; something hot as——" He raised his eyes and saw himself in the mirror above the mantelpiece. His hat was still on his head, and he removed it and flung it on a chair. "I beg your pardon," he said, in a changed voice. "I was not aware that my head was covered."

Mercy left him, and he sat down and bent low over the crackling logs, almost touching them with his outstretched hands. He was cold again, now, very cold, in spite of his potations. When the coffee came, steaming hot, he drank it greedily, and was hardly conscious that his mouth was scalded until the pain drove him to his feet. He controlled himself quickly, and with shaking hand poured out another cup; but now seated himself at the table in order to steady his elbow. When he had drained the cup, he raised his head, and there, before him, illuminated by the light from the lamp on the side-board at his back, was the Rich Young Ruler, asking with haggard eyes the question that was never answered.

The sight roused George to sudden fury.

"Look at him!" he said aloud. "It's Jim! Jim, the smug hypocrite! Jim, who deceives nobody, not even himself, and thinks he can get the blind side of God! You're done, Jim, done! Roger's done you out! The idle young ruler has bested you! You've gained the whole world and lost your darned soul! Lost it, d'you hear? Lost it! You're a lost soul, Jim, and so am I—we're both lost souls! How's that suit you, eh?—you and your prodigal brother both lost souls! You'll curl your lip, will you? You'll get down out of the frame to me——?"

With a sudden movement he rose from his chair and leapt on to the table. Passion and fear were blazing in his eyes, but he drew his clasp-knife from his pocket, and holding his left arm bent above his head, as if to protect himself from assault, reached forward and struck the canvas with his knife—once, twice, obliterating the eyes. Then he jumped down, and with the speed of a murderer who sees himself pursued, fled into the hall and let himself out. The knife was still in his hand, but he dropped it as he opened the gate, and sped, hatless, up the road towards the moor.

Tom Turner saw him leave, and for a moment or two his heart seemed to stop its beat. This was a flight; there could be no doubt of that—what could it mean except that the madman had done some rash deed? His mother had declared the man was mad, and this incident proved it to be so. These reflections flashed across his brain, but they did not leave him irresolute. He sprang down the bank into the road just as Mercy appeared in the doorway, and instead of following the fugitive, he hurried up to her. The open clasp-knife lay on the flagged path, and he stooped to pick it up.

"What's amiss, Mercy?" he asked anxiously.

"There's naught amiss that I'm aware of," she answered in her usual calm voice, "except that it looks as if the bees had got out of his head into his breeches. They were buzzing when he came in, and

a drink of coffee I gave him must have disturbed 'em—that is, if he's drunk it."

She pushed open the dining-room door as she spoke, and the disordered table-cloth at once caught her attention. "Why, I do believe he's had his feet on it!" she said.

It was Tom who glanced up and saw the picture, and he laid a hand on Mercy's arm. "He's mad, Mercy! Look there!"

Mercy stared at the picture, and then at Tom. For once words failed her. There was something pathetic in the sight of the Rich Young Ruler standing there blinded and disfigured, yet with an expression of painful patience, as if this were the price he must pay for his irresolution. To Mercy it was as though a living being had been stabbed—a mute inmate of the household—and her breath came in gasps as she realised what this would mean to Roger. It takes long in the telling, but only seconds elapsed before she heard Tom say:

"I must follow him, Mercy. He's lost his wits, and heaven only knows what he'll do. Tell Mr. Roger when he comes in that I'll do my best. Thank God it is only *him* that he's stabbed!"

"Take a stick, Tom," said Mercy when they reached the hall; but he shook his head.

"It will only be in the way," he said.

He walked until he was through the village, fearing to arouse the curiosity that breeds sensational exaggerations; but he found men and women standing in groups with their eyes turned always in the same direction. Occasionally he was recognised and greeted.

"Seen aught o' t' runaway, Tom?"

"Has he 'scaped t' bobbies or t' 'sylum, think ye?"

"He's a pair o' good bellowses, has t' chap, I'll stand it!"

Tom halted, and tried to sound indifferent.

"Who is he, do you think?" he inquired, anxious to know if George had been recognised.

"That's what we're all asking," was the reply. "It's

getting dark, and he went past like greased lightning, didn't chap ! "

" He's perhaps running for a wager," remarked Tom, as he turned away ; and he merely laughed when the reply followed him :

" Running for his life, more liker ! "

There was no mistaking the route George had taken, for at the fork of the roads some women were peering into the gloom and talking volubly.

" It's Lancashire he's aiming for. I've heard tell 'at our bobbies can't touch 'em once they get there. They can stand on t'other side o' t' boundary stone an' put their tongues out at Yorkshire bobbies."

" Funny sort o' law, is that——"

There were no houses now, and Tom quickened his pace. A moment or two later he began to run, but not fast, for he knew he must not exhaust himself. Clouds were gathering thickly overhead with the promise of rain, and a thin mist crept down the sides of the hills and hung over the fields. Soon it became really dark, and all Nature was enveloped in a great silence. Three times Tom stopped and strained his ears to listen, hoping to distinguish the sound of hurrying feet ; but there was grass on the roadside, and madmen are cunning.

Suddenly, out of the shadows fifty yards in front of him, a man sprang to his feet, and after a moment's hesitation bounded forward again. There was no mistaking either the figure or the action, and Tom moderated his pace to a quick walk. Up to this point he had not asked himself what course he must pursue when he came up with the runaway, but now that he was almost in touch with him, he could not help realising that the situation had its difficulties and dangers, and called for the exercise of care and discretion.

It would be untrue to say that he was not afraid, for, though he did not lack courage, he was aware that even in ordinary circumstances he was no match physically for this man who had been hardened by

the rough life of the backwoods ; and he knew that madmen are possessed of superhuman strength. But the courageous man is he who does not allow fear to master him, and he did not hesitate. The man was Nell's father, and he was in trouble—a danger to himself and to the community. That consideration was in itself a sufficient spur. Nell must be spared sorrow and shame at any cost. This first wild deed of her father's in Roger's dining-room had been comparatively harmless ; but what might the next be ? He tried to determine a course of action as he ran on, and his brain refused to serve him ; he could not think ; he could only conjure up visions. Cautiously, keeping whenever possible in the darker shadows, he followed, guided by an instinct that he never questioned or dreamed of questioning—over gates and dry walls ; up the steep slopes of a grassy hill that shelved down from the moor ; on to the moor itself, never halting, yet never slackening ; convinced, though he heard and saw nothing, that he was on the right track ; and so came at length to the top of the famous limestone quarry.

It was as he had felt it would be. George was standing on the edge, peering down into the blackness that washed the base of the lofty cliffs like the sombre waters of a mountain tarn. It was impossible to know what look was on his face, but his attitude was that of a diver who hesitates to make the plunge.

Tom was quite self-possessed now. He had not met Nell's father, and was therefore safe from recognition, but the thought never crossed his mind. All that mattered was that the man should be saved, and that action should be taken quickly.

"A long drop, isn't it ?" he said in as natural a voice as he could command. He had strolled up carelessly until he stood by the man's side, but George never so much as turned his head. "You're a bit too near the edge for safety," he went on. "I'd step back a yard or two if I were you."

Slowly George turned his eyes on the intruder, but

showed no signs of surprise or irritation. Tom noted with satisfaction that his breathing was laboured, and took this for an evidence of exhaustion; but that the man was distraught his first words made clear.

"A long drop—yes; but it's the nearest way home, my lad. The road runs at the foot of the quarry, but it's a darned long way round by the moor. Now, if you step over the edge, you're there in a jiffy. Why the devil should a man tire himself by walking miles when there's a short cut at his feet—eh?"

"It's too deep a step to start with," Tom replied, with a coolness that surprised himself. "You'd get a nasty jolt, old man, at the bottom. I'm going down to the road myself. Come, we'll go together, shall we?—and I'll lend you a hand. It's a bit rough in places."

He laid his hand on George's sleeve, but it was shaken off at once.

"I'm for the short cut, my lad. My daughter will be waiting for me—my daughter, Nell: mine and Rosie's. You never knew Rosie, perhaps—Rosie, who was my wife?"

Tom temporised—there was hope in delay.

"Rosie, Rosie?" he said. "I seem to have some sort of recollection of the name. And Nell——There's a Miss Nell Laycock; you'll be Mr. George Laycock, maybe? I don't know Rosie, but I know Miss Nell, if she's the one you mean."

"Aye, everybody knows Nell—a fine girl, that; but a darned fool all the same, because she wants to marry Tom—Tom what's his name—Tom, Tom, the piper's son; only the piper is a gardener——"

"You're shivering, old chap," Tom said. "Your teeth are chattering. This air cuts like a knife. There's a farm not far away where they'll give us a seat by the fire, and you shall tell me about this Tom. I know the fellow, and I can put you up to a thing or two, I daresay."

"It's no use, my lad," George broke in. "Nell's

a Laycock, and she's set her teeth—naught'll move her. But come, we'll sit down, and I'll ask you a question. Cold? I'm hot, I tell you; hot as hell-fire."

He seated himself on the grass, with his feet overhanging the precipice, and Tom sat down beside him.

"I've something to ask you, I say. It's about Nell. Nell is my daughter, you know, and she wants to marry the son of my brother Jim's gardener. Now, do you think Jim will like that? Don't you think Sir James will be annoyed? Can't you see that Saint James will be distressed? I put it to you, young man, don't you think my little lass might look higher than a gardener's son?"

"She might, indeed," Tom replied. "I tell you what—we'll go and find Tom, you and I, and you shall tell him what you think, and I'll see he listens to you."

"Aye, but you see," George explained in a whisper, "she's Roger's girl now, not mine. I sold her to him like a little slave, for thousands of dollars; and Roger is pleased for her to marry the gardener's son——"

"He isn't worthy of her," Tom broke in. "Come, I know where we can find him, and you shall tell him so to his face." He prepared to rise as he spoke, but George detained him.

"Yes, but we will go by the short cut, the two of us together, and his own heart will tell him even if my lips are silent. Do you know what brought me here in the darkness? It was because I came to this spot once with Rosie—years ago, when we were both young and I loved her. I held her arm whilst she looked down, and she said, 'That's the nearest way home, George. If you are tired, you'd better go that way, and then I shall be a widow. Don't you think widow's weeds would suit me?' That is what she said.

'I was angry; but Rosie laughed—she always laughed when I was angry. It was her way, you see, always—laughing at life and thinking only of herself.

She was a child, who thought life was sweetmeats and pretty frocks, and pocketfuls of money. You didn't know Rosie, you said?"

"I know your teeth are chattering, old man," Tom replied, "and if you stop here much longer, you'll get your death of cold. I'd like you to find this young fellow you've been speaking of, and he isn't down there——"

"I tell you we'll go the near way," George interrupted in a sharper voice. "I don't care a darned cent about Tom. It'll please Rosie. 'Best for you and best for me,' she said in her letter; and Nell will be pleased, too. Come, we've talked about it long enough, and we shall be home ever so soon."

Away in the distance on the road below Tom saw the lights of a rapidly approaching motor-car. The far-extending rays lit up the grey walls and brought into view a hundred well-known objects of the wayside. The throb of the engine reached his ears, and he fancied it had a familiar sound. Quite deliberately he drew a matchbox and a packet of cigarettes from his pocket and struck a light.

"I'll have a cig. before we start," he said. "Do you smoke, Mr. Laycock?"

George took the cigarette and tossed it into the quarry. Tom laughed.

"We shan't hear it drop," he said. "Let us see if we can find out how far it is down."

There was plenty of long dry grass around them, and he gathered a little heap together and set fire to it. Then he kicked it over the edge.

The idea took George's fancy, and Tom went on repeating the experiment, until the older man tired.

"You can please yourself," said Tom. "but I'm not going until I've finished this cig."

The delay was sufficient. Roger and his companion had seen the signal, and made their way with all speed to the top of the quarry. George offered no resistance when they came upon him; and the three men escorted him to the car.

CHAPTER XXVIII

IN WHICH GEORGE MAKES A CONFESSION

THE lamp was turned low in George's bedroom, and a folding screen shielded the patient's face from the rays of the fire. The greater part of the room was in semi-darkness, for though the blinds had not been drawn there was little light in the sky, which was overclouded, and heavy with the threat of a storm. It had been dull all day; a trying day for an invalid who had just struggled back to consciousness, and no less for those who waited upon him. Everything was very still, both within and without the room. An elegant gilt clock stood upon the mantelpiece, but the key was not to be found and it pointed to the hour when it had run down—how many years before?—seventeen minutes to twelve. George's watch had been suspended from one of the clock's four minarets, and Mary was surprised to find how loudly it ticked. In the deep silence it seemed to fill the room with its message of the passing hours. It beat with the noise of a hammer on the tympanum of Mary's ear, and gave her concern for the sleeper who must surely, she thought, be awakened by the sound, yet he slept on, breathing regularly, except that at long intervals an exhalation that sounded like a sigh would be emitted, causing his nurse to turn her head and watch for signs of returning consciousness.

Mary was weary, for the struggle had been protracted, and during the days and nights of delirium no one else had been able to quieten him. The professional

nurse had to be removed—the sight of her uniform infuriated him. He did not recognise Nell and regarded her suspiciously at first, though he did not actually refuse her ministrations. It was Mary, however, who smoothed the creases from his brow and brought a gentler light into his eyes. She could do nothing wrong. Her voice soothed him ; it was so gentle, so unaffectedly kind and sympathetic, so confident, too ; and she never hesitated or seemed perplexed. He was restless when she was not near him ; and the strain of constant attendance was beginning to tell on her, for she had never been strong and was getting older. There were grey hairs on her head ; too many to be counted, now, though only a year ago Roger had sworn they did not number ten. Lack of sleep had brought lines of weariness to the corners of her eyes and weighted the lids, but she had ample resources of determination and spirit. She let the socks she was darning fall to her lap and her eyes closed. For the first time whilst she had been on duty she dozed, and George awoke.

He could see her from where he lay, and he watched the gentle heaving of her breast and the slight movements of her head without once removing his eyes. It was soothing and pleasant to let them rest upon her. There was something in the contemplation of her face that had a comforting, healing influence. It was a new experience and strangely agreeable. Some unseen messenger must have whispered to her brain what was passing across his for Mary awoke with a start and glanced quickly and guiltily towards the bed. At once she was wide awake.

"I've been asleep" ; she said—"hard on, too ! I hope you haven't wanted anything, George."

"I'm always wanting something, Mary," he replied ; and in the weak voice there was a trace of the old grimly-sarcastic note. "I'm wanting *her*. I know I'm a darned fool and that I ought to hate her name ; but then I always have been a darned fool. She liked you, Mary—there was no one whom she liked so well —and it surprised me, for you and Rosie are as far

apart as the Poles. It surprised her, too, and I believe she was half-ashamed of herself. If she had been capable of loving she would have loved you: indeed, she said she did."

"She was always very sweet to me," said Mary, "but you must remember your weakness, George——"

"I do," he interrupted, dryly; "but when I've anything to say I'm accustomed to say it, and weak as I am I may soon be weaker. I suppose you're in this young medico's confidence—is it months or only weeks he gives me?"

"He says that one can never be sure," Mary replied.

"An evasion—I quite understand! The old sawbones on the steamer had occasion to examine me, and he told me the lease was nearly up, so it's no shock. 'Whiskey and worry 'ud kill an elephant,' he said; and I asked him if he'd have one with me. He did—he was a Scotsman—and he reeled off a few more unpalatable truths after he'd drained the glass."

"You shall tell me more another time," said Mary. "You must have your medicine now."

"I'm Mary's little lamb, like everybody else," he remarked with a smile. "All the same I've something on my chest and I'm going to get it off. You'll find a bunch of keys in my trousers pocket. Open this top drawer, will you? and give me a bundle of letters you'll see there."

Mary obeyed and returned to her seat on the hearth, whilst he turned over the envelopes with fingers that lingered over the task.

"They are all hers," he explained—"all she ever wrote me. She wasn't much of a correspondent."

He selected one bulkier than the rest and tried to throw it to her, but it dropped down by the side of the bed, and he was full of apologies.

"I haven't a baby's strength," he said. "I want you to read that letter, Mary."

She laid her work on the ottoman and withdrew the closely-written sheets. They were covered on both sides with Rosie's untidy but legible handwriting, and

George had numbered them in pencil and underlined them here and there. It was evident that they had been often read, for they were soiled and creased. Date and place were missing, and George had supplied the omission.

"My Dear George,

"I have made up my mind to go away, but just at what moment I cannot determine. It will be when I become really desperate and full up to the neck, and then I shall be off like a shot. I've thought about it until I couldn't think any longer, and my head was in a whirl, and I've tried my best, I really have; but I was never meant to be the dairyman's daughter or his wife either, and Mathieson's long face raises my dander. If I stop here I shall choke, and there's nowhere else you can take me now that you've spent all your money and got into debt. I suppose you'll say I've helped you to spend it; and if you're particularly nasty you'll vow that it has been all my fault and that I've been extravagant and reckless. No doubt I have, and it would have been better for us both if you had been man enough to put your foot down and stop it instead of getting into a temper and using highly-coloured words, and buying further supplies of whiskey, and then giving in. You see I thought you were very rich when I promised to marry you, and you certainly made me think you were going to be; and when you chucked your job I naturally thought you were. It was your riches I loved, though I liked you well enough. You will do me the justice to admit, however, that I told you I didn't love you a tiny bit more than lots of other fellows, and that if I married you it would be because you could give me a jolly good time, so that you see I was perfectly frank about it. And I also told you that I didn't care anything about spooning and babies and all that sort of thing and you'd find me just about as comfortable to cuddle as Cleopatra's needle; that I hadn't an ounce of re-

ligion in all my seven-stone-ten, and that the only God I worshipped was £ s. d., and the only goddess, myself. And you took me knowing all this, and I really did try, honestly, to be a decent sort of wife, though I nearly burst in the attempt. I think some people were never meant to be staid and proper, like Edie and Flo, or good and domesticated, like Mary. I was meant for a dancer ; to receive applause and flowers and silly young men's attentions—plenty of flattery, and expensive suppers—for a life of variety, in fact ; and you tried to turn me into a sort of super-housekeeper-cum-nursery-governess, and it can't have been my fault altogether that it didn't work. We both made a mistake, and I'm bound to say I'm downright sorry for you, because there's no denying you've played the game and stuck to me through thick and thin. I've wished many a hundred times you hadn't, because we could then have gone our separate ways and no bones broken. But at heart you're as moral as your saintly brother, and it gets me by the throat. When I run away I suppose I shall go straight to Wilfred and have a good time for a few months. After that he'll tire of me and chuck me aside like a worn sock. You see I have no illusions. I'm not leaving you because I love someone better—I don't love *anybody !* though I once thought I loved Mary, and I've a queer sort of pricking sensation at the place where my heart ought to be when I think of Nell.

" That reminds me. You will get a divorce, of course, and they'll give you charge of the child, which is as it should be ; for though I feel rather soft about the kid I try to forget her and to hope that she'll forget me. The best thing would be to tell her I'm dead, as I am, in one sense—dead to duty and decency and everything that is good. I don't think she'll fret very much.

" I suppose I shall go back to dancing if I'm not considered too old. I could give a long start to some of those Chicago chits even at my advanced age.

I'm good for a few years, and after that—the devil or the deep sea. Oh, yes, I know what I'm doing, and that I shall have to foot the bill myself, but it's Kismet.

"I'm sorry to put you about, old boy, for I know you'll mope and fret, but I hope you won't go to the dogs. You've got Mat and he'll keep an eye on you and pray for you—he'll think me past praying for—and *I* would pray for you if I believed there was anything in it. We're funny creatures, all of us; all a bit mad, but some worse than others. I feel as if I want to say 'God bless you!' when I don't know that there is a God, and when I'm doing my best to drive you to the devil. And you're a queer mixture, George: a mongrel sort of man; neither good nor bad; not much use at anything but making good resolutions and breaking them—with my help.

"And so I'm sincere when I say I am really sorry for you, and if I live eight or nine years longer I shan't be a bit surprised if I'm sorry for myself and wish I had never run away. I shan't be a bit surprised if I want to creep back and ask to be made one of your hired servants. But then, you see, you'll never have any hired servants, and besides I very much want what Wilfred can give me and you can't. So you see I shall have to go, and as the old song says it is 'best for you and best for me.'

"I don't ask you to forgive me because, of course, that is out of the question; but if I thought you could manage to understand and think kindly of me now and then I should be really glad. I shall always think kindly of you and Roger and Mary, to say nothing of Nell, and I suppose I shall shed a good many tears when I come to my senses, and realise that I've wiped you all out of my life; but it can't be helped.

"Good-bye. I'm not feeling nearly as clever at the end of my letter as when I began it.

"Rosie."

Mary's eyes were blurred when she replaced the sheets in the envelope, but George's were quite dry.

"Put the bundle back in the drawer, will you Mary," he said; but when she went up to his bedside to take it from him he held the package in his hand and looked down at it hesitatingly.

"No; burn them all," he said. "Let me see them burn, Mary. Let me see the few ounces of romance my life has held consumed in smoke."

"Yes," said Mary; "it is best to destroy them and keep them in your memory."

"And memory is incombustible, worse luck," he said.

She moved the screen a little, and set the letters one by one upon the fire, stirring the charred remains with the poker while George watched her.

"That writes 'Finis' to my love story," he said bitterly.

"I wonder!" Mary replied. "I sometimes think that true love is immortal, and that what we give out must return to us—sometime, somewhere. 'Many waters cannot quench love,' and yours has not been quenched, George. Poor Rosie! You have loved her all the way through and you love her still. You have never deceived me, George."

"Yes," he said, "you are right—I love her still—heaven only knows why. There has never been anyone else and there never could be. I've never gone sloppy over her or called her an angel and that sort of rot—for I've known all along that she had a lot of the devil in her, and it was that which was so attractive; so I can't blame her, can I, as if she had deceived me? If I love her still it's because she's—just Rosie. And loving as I do, like that, it's beastly hard luck that I'm the only one of the lot who doesn't know what it is to be loved. You and Flo love your husbands, and even Jim has a wife who shows him affection in her own stiff way; but I——. It just won't bear thinking of, Mary. Sometimes it drives me crazy and at others I feel like slobbering; but do you know

why I won't let Roger bring this parson to try to patch me up for heaven? You don't? Well, I'll tell you: it's because if Rosie has to go to hell for running off with that devil, Steiner, I don't want to go anywhere else."

He tightened his lips and looked defiantly into Mary's eyes, but saw at once that he had failed to disconcert her. On the contrary her face was lit up with sympathy and understanding.

"That's just the strong, fierce love that God Himself has for all us sinners," she said. "It's 'the love that will not let me go' that the hymn speaks of. It makes me feel very proud of you, George——!"

"Proud of me?" he broke in with a short, dubious laugh. "I'm a darned fine fellow for anyone to be proud of, aren't I?"

"Yes," said Mary; "anyone who loves like that is to be both pitied and envied. Shall I tell you how I look at it? I don't know that the parsons would agree with me, of course; but I think Paul must have felt something like you when he said he had great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart, and could wish for himself that he were accursed from Christ for his brethren. You must leave Rosie with God—'shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?'"

"It won't be right if He separates us!" George replied fiercely. "I tell you it won't, Mary; not after the lonely hell I've had down here!"

"Hush!" said Mary. "This is not good for you, George, and you will get me into trouble with the doctor. Love like yours is invincible, and I don't think God *will* separate you. I think Rosie's heart would almost break if she knew. I think she could not help loving you. Lie still, now, and be hopeful, as I am, that all will even yet be well. Your pulse is much too quick."

She kept her fingers on his wrist; and yielding to her heart's impulse bent quietly and kissed his forehead.

"For Rosie!" she said.

CHAPTER XXIX

IN WHICH NELL AND HER FATHER ARE ON GOOD TERMS

THE curtains were drawn in George's bedroom, and the hearth was almost enclosed by the heavy folding screen, which gave snugness and safety to the invalid, who leaned back in the thickly-cushioned, upholstered chair, and with hands clasped over the rug that stretched down to his feet, was content to sit still and think.

Nell was on the other side of the hearth, just beyond the protection of the screen, busily engaged with the drawn-thread work which was at that time the fashionable employment of leisured ladies. As she worked, she crooned her favourite airs in faint tones—faint, because the airs were merely the half-conscious, musical accompaniments of her thoughts, and also because her father had for the past hour shown an inclination to doze.

Several wax candles burned on the mantelpiece, but the firelight was the chief illuminant. Long tongues of flame leapt to the chimney, throwing largess of gold into the confined space about the hearth, and sending dancing shadows to the ceiling and the remoter parts of the room. The wash of warm colour heightened the attractions of Nell's delicately-tinted yet healthy-looking cheeks, but seemed only to accentuate the waxen wanness of her father's. His beard had been cut short and trimmed, and his face was not so careworn

as formerly. He looked younger and brighter, yet the most unpractised, unobservant eye must have seen at a glance that the man was desperately ill; and those who looked longer and inquiringly would have read in his eyes and face the tokens of a man of sorrows.

George glanced across when the murmured strains of *By the Banks of Allan Water* reached his ears. Nell was bending over her work, thoroughly absorbed in it, and did not see the look of pain that crossed her father's face. For a long time he continued to observe her closely, remaining motionless except that the muscles of his face twitched at times, and his hands clasped each other more tightly. He was observing the grown woman in his child, taking note of her appealing attractiveness, and trying to put a name to it. She was not "winsome"—that appellation was for a more gentle, retiring loveliness. Nell's face was strong, self-confident, purposeful; there was something of queenly beauty about it—the beauty that is also grace; yet Nell was not queenly. Anyhow, it was the face of a handsome woman, and there was not one single repellent line—so George told himself, with a sense of satisfaction and pride.

"Bother it!" The musical note was exchanged for one of suppressed annoyance as Nell's cotton twisted itself into a knot. Realising that she had raised her voice, she looked up and saw her father's eyes fixed half-humorously, half-sadly upon her. Then she smiled.

"You're like your mother, Nell," George said slowly, and with manifest effort; "and yet so unlike."

Nell laid her work carefully on the rug. "I've something I should like to show you," she said.

She left the room and returned a few moments later with a framed water-colour and a small easel.

"I must set it where the light will do it justice," she remarked.

He made no attempt to see what she was evidently anxious to conceal, but watched her as she changed the position of the easel and stood back to ascertain

the result. Many things reminded him of his wife—her light step was like her mother's; her figure, as she stooped and turned, so like Rosie's when he had first known her. A greater warmth burned at his heart than he had experienced for years.

"There!" said Nell at length; and returned to her seat.

It was a portrait of Nell standing with her hands clasped behind her back before the picture of her mother, and looking with eyes that were tenderly curious into eyes that sparkled with saucy laughter.

He recognised Rosie's picture at once. It still hung on the wall in the drawing-room, where she had arranged it herself. How well he remembered the occasion! They were just back from Harrogate, and Rosie was eager to see what the artist had made of her—eager to know if the oval frame she had selected suited the subject. She had been pleased, and had sought to hide her pleasure behind a screen of mockery; and he had stood with his arm about her waist, happy in the pride of possession.

A mist came over his eyes as he gazed on this second picture. The look on Nell's face as she stood before the painting was strangely like her mother's, despite the difference of mood. It was too much for the husband and father, and there were tears in his eyes when he turned them away.

"Oh, father!" Nell exclaimed in remorseful tones.

She went across and knelt down on the hearth, winding her arms about his neck and laying her cheek against his. She had never done so before, and he raised his head and let it rest on her shoulder.

"Who painted it, child?" he asked; and she answered, "Tom! It is to go to the Academy."

He was silent for a moment or two, and then said:

"You shall send Tom to me, and he will hang the picture there—over the mantelpiece. You'll lend it to your father, won't you? No, no! To-morrow will do. I'm—I'm rather shaken and must not see him now. Tell me about—Tom."

She rose and measured some medicine into a glass, and when he had drunk it, seated herself on the rug beside his knee and began her story, with his hand softly stroking her rich, brown hair.

"It all seems rather amusing now," she said, "but life was a great tragedy in those far-off days when you left me with aunt Edie. You couldn't be expected to know what a peevish little girl I was when I was at the Hall, and how I hated Eric and Ralph, who really were awful little prigs, and as soft as an over-ripe banana.

"They hated me, too, but didn't say so because uncle Jim had taught them that it was wrong to hate anyone except Satan; so they just translated their feelings into actions, you understand, and pinched me and played all sorts of mean, sly tricks on me, which I'm sure I richly deserved, for I was just as horrid and haughty and provoking as I knew how to be.

"Now we come to Tom! One day when we were all three near the greenhouses, Ralph pulled my hair-ribbon loose and dropped it in a celery-trench, and Eric put his foot on the side of the trench and buried it. The gardener's boy was standing a few yards away and saw them do it, and when Eric and Ralph ran off, laughing, he came up and unearthed my poor ribbon. It was very much messed, of course, and he wiped it with his handkerchief and handed it to me. I wouldn't put it on, but I said 'Thank you,' and asked him if his name was Tom.

"He was an awfully nice boy, with gentlemanly manners and quick, kind eyes, and a grave smile that made his rather plain face quite attractive. He was several years older than Eric, but not much taller or stouter, though, of course, he wasn't as flabby.

"He said 'Yes; and I'd have given them a jolly good hiding if they hadn't been the master's sons; but, you see, I daren't, because Mr. Laycock would send father away. They're cry-babies, and I could "pay" them both with one hand tied behind my back'

"'What do you want to fight them for?' I asked. 'Are they nasty to you?'

"'To me?' He shook his head. 'They never look my way. I've never spoken to either of them; but they're horrid with you, and they've spoiled your pretty ribbon.'

"I believe I laughed then. 'I like you, Tom Turner,' I said, 'but you needn't bother your head about me. I could fight them with one hand, too, but I don't. I'm ever so horrid and nasty myself, and I pay them back in ways that make them wriggle, like worms when robins are pecking at them. They'll suffer for this; make no mistake. I hate them. I hate everybody.' I was an awful little savage in those days.

"He opened his eyes ever so wide at that. 'Everybody?' he said; and I replied, 'Well, nearly everybody.'

"He shook his head. 'You couldn't hate my mother,' he said. 'Nobody could hate my mother.'

"'You don't know what I could do,' I replied. 'I hate God, because He lets me go on living here with uncle James; so, of course, I could hate anybody.'

"'Not my mother,' he said. 'You just couldn't hate my mother.'

"So naturally I went to see his mother, and the boys spied on me and told aunt Edie. Poor aunt Edie nearly had the house disinfected. She made a terrible fussation about it, and I was forbidden to go again. Of course, I wouldn't promise, so she told uncle that Turner must be dismissed. Then I had to promise.

"That didn't hinder me from seeing Tom sometimes, and he used to show me his sketches. It was great fun hiding from the boys, and leading them on false scents. Then one day I grew reckless, and followed Tom to the moors, where he was painting. I was lost for hours, and the whole countryside was up. Uncle Roger found me; but he never peached about Tom, because it wasn't Tom's fault in the slightest, you see.

"Well, after I ran away and was so ill, aunt Mary didn't mind how often I saw the Turners, and in their home I learned what love meant, as well as at uncle Roger's. And—well, don't you see?—after that love just grew. Tom became all the world to me, though his mother was frightened out of her wits when she saw how things were going. You aren't a bit more distressed, dad, than she is. 'The soft goods in the kitchen' is awfully nervous, but she's one of the best souls in the world."

She stopped and for a moment or two there was silence. Her father's fingers still toyed with her hair, and if she could but have seen it, there was a look of sadness in his eyes.

"You are very sure you love him, Nell? You have seen so few men, I imagine—your father's fault. Are you certain he loves you?"

"My heart would answer if it could," she replied. "I think we have loved each other from that first meeting. You must know him, dad, and then you will like him too."

"Love is a consuming fire, Nell," he said in a low, intense voice. "Sometimes it smoulders and at other times it flames, but if it is the real thing, it lives; and when it is not returned, it burns inwards, searing the soul and hardening the heart; burning, always burning, and creating the torments of hell. Be sure you *both* love! Be sure it *is* love—not just a romantic attachment—not just a fancy—not just animal passion. It ust be the real thing, or you'd better cut your throat than marry; but if it *is* the real thing—on both sides, mind you—then marry a roadmender if you like, and you'll get a bit of heaven!"

Nell turned and faced him. "Dad," she said, "you've been hungering all these years for love!"

She searched his eyes, her own wide and full of pity, and he took her hands in his.

"Nell," he said, "I've hungered and thirsted for ust one woman's love, and I neglected my child for it

One woman starved me, but I have starved myself, too—I might have had yours."

"You have it now," she said. "Oh, dad, if only I had known! If only I had known!"

"I've made a mess of life, Nell—an awful mess. I've lived for pleasure, for myself, and it hasn't been life at all. Perhaps it might have been if your mother—But I don't know. I was to blame from the beginning—Nell, I wonder if you can forgive your mother? I've no right to ask it, I know, but you have forgiven me."

She met his appealing look with a smile.

"I'm her daughter, dad. I was thinking about it when Tom saw me standing before her portrait in the drawing-room, and made the first rough sketch for his picture. He said to me, 'Do you love her, Nell?' And I shook my head. 'No,' I said; 'but I've rather nice recollections of her, and I'm kindly disposed, and most awfully sorry for her. You see she never did me any harm.'"

"He wouldn't understand that?" George commented when he saw her hesitate.

"No, he didn't; because, you see, he had only one idea of what mothers are and ought to be, and he said, 'But, Nell, she abandoned you! It seems to me like the heartlessness of the Roman mothers who "exposed" their children in the squares and public-places at Rome, and went away to their feasting and dancing without a care.'

"'Oh, no, it wasn't like that,' I said; 'you see they gave me to aunt Mary and uncle Roger, and did me a splendid turn. You don't mind my saying that, do you, dad? You see I'm quite frank with you."

He pressed her hand, but remained silent.

"'So that you see,' I went on, 'it wouldn't be right of me to bear them a grudge when they've given me such an awfully happy life.'"

George was gazing into the fire with eyes that were heavily overcharged with pain.

"I was thinking what comfort I have lost all these years, Nell," he said; "how happy you and I might have been together! But it is only fancy. You would not have been the Nell you are; and I—I could never have been happy without your mother. I wonder if I dare ask you to make me a promise——?"

"Try me!" she said.

"If ever your mother should come back," he said, "will you give her a home, Nell; and be kind to her?"

"Why, of course," she replied, with the unmistakable emphasis of goodwill.

His eyes brightened. "That removes a great load from my mind," he said. "I don't suppose she'll ever come; but one never knows."

He was much more cheerful. "I think I should like to see your Tom after all," he said. "Do you think he might hang that picture to-night? But perhaps he is not in the house?"

"I think he is," she replied. "I will go and see."

"Let him come alone," George said. "Just for five minutes—not more."

"I wonder what aunt Mary will say," Nell hesitated.

"Hang aunt Mary!" he replied. "My life's my own, isn't it?" and at the irritable inquiry Nell laughed.

"No," she said, "I've a first mortgage on it now!"

Several minutes elapsed before Tom came. The ordeal of entering unannounced and making himself known to the man who was Nell's father, and whom he had encountered before under such strange conditions, was not a welcome one, but he walked up to the hearth, and in a pleasantly respectful tone said:

"Nell tells me you wish to see me, sir. I am glad to hear you are feeling stronger."

George made no reply, and his hands remained clasped on his knees. Something of puzzlement and something of uneasiness shone in the eyes which stared searchingly at his visitor.

"Where the tarnation have I seen you before?" he asked himself, with unfriendly impatience. Then enlightenment came, and his brow darkened. "Why,

you're the darned young fellow I couldn't get rid of in my dreams—the young fellow that was everlastingly trying to push me over the edge of a quarry."

Tom's heart sank. "You have been delirious, sir," he said. "You must try to forget those nightmares."

"Delirious! I know I have." His eyes were still scanning every feature of Tom's face. "But, darn it, man! Seeing I've never set eyes on you until this minute, how does it happen that my crazed brain holds your portrait, and shoved it before my eyes day and night? How is it that the very tone of your voice is the same as that darned scamp's that tried to murder me?"

"Our brains play us strange tricks, sir," Tom replied, "when fever takes control. I saw you here the night you were taken ill. Your mind must have retained the memory. I helped Mr. Roger to get you to bed."

George sighed. "That's the explanation, I suppose." Then he leaned back and closed his eyes.

"I wanted a chat with you, Tom, and I thought you would perhaps hang your picture over my mantelpiece; but I'm feeling done up. To-morrow, perhaps—I can't stand it now. Ask Mrs. Roger to come up, will you?"

He held out his hand, and Tom took it for a second; then hastened to summon Mary.

CHAPTER XXX

IN WHICH GEORGE RECEIVES MORE THAN ONE SHOCK

"DO you mind leaving me alone with the patient, or rather the impatient, Mrs. Roger?" the doctor said, with grim humour. "I may be tempted to use language with rather too much scarlet in it if your brother-in-law goes on as he has begun; and I want no recording angels present in case my practice should be damaged."

"He *is* a wee bit cantankerous this morning," Mary replied brightly. "A good sign, isn't it?"

"I don't know," said the doctor. "I wish I did."

Mary left the room and the doctor lit a cigarette. "I hope you don't mind," he remarked, as he went up to the hearth and stood with his back to the fire. "There's nothing much doing this morning. Crisp, healthy weather like this isn't a doctor's November."

George said nothing. He was sitting up in bed, with a newspaper in his hands, and his eyes fixed intently upon it. A look of impatience and annoyance shadowed his face, and he merely frowned at the doctor's observations.

"What's the matter with you this morning?" the doctor went on. "You're as cheerful as a caged hyena; and yet your tongue isn't nearly as yellow as it has been, and your pulse is quite good—for you. Who has been sandpapering you this time?"

"I tell you what, Herbert," growled George; "you're a darned sight clumsier doctor than your dad was. How much longer are you going to keep me alive? Do you think I want to lie here and rot for centuries! I thought you said I was going to die?"

"So you are," the doctor replied. "So am I. It's only one here and there who goes in a chariot and saves funeral expenses. Laycock, I'm not at all sure you aren't a blooming fraud! When I first saw you I gave you three weeks—mentally, of course. Now I'm inclined to give you three years."

"Then put some arsenic in the mixture; *I* shan't blame you!"

"You're a remarkable case," continued the doctor imperturbably. "Once over, I should have said the slightest shock would kill you, but it seems to me you thrive on shocks. Every time you get upset, or upset yourself, your pulse becomes firmer. If only we could arrange a really first-class respectable shock I'm inclined to think it might save your life, or, at any rate, prolong it. There isn't anything of the sort you can think of, I suppose, that we might try?"

"There are two or three things," George replied, with increased irritation. "You might arrange your own funeral, or Jim's bankruptcy, or get Roger arrested for criminally assaulting one of his weavers."

"There doesn't seem much hope in those directions," commented the doctor.

George's eyes remained glued to a paragraph in the *Montreal Star*.

"The engagement of Mr. Francis Lloyd Raymond, of Ottawa, to Miss Agnes Ruddock, only daughter of the late Cecil K. Ruddock, of this city, is announced. The young lady and her aunt are at present in Algiers, where Mr. Raymond and his mother are likely to join them without delay. The wedding will probably take place in the spring. The engagement—or re-engagement, to be quite accurate—has aroused much interest in the circles in both cities where the two young people move."

"Seriously, Laycock," the doctor went on, "I believe you need rousing—thoroughly shaking up. An explosion would do you good—at any rate, I would take the risk of trying it. Wrapping a fellow like you in cotton wool and singing lullabies isn't a ha-porth of good——"

"I tell you what it is, Herbert," George interposed, "if you've no patients to go to will you kindly go to the devil or anywhere else where you'll be welcome? All I want at present is to be left alone. That's brutal frankness—truth with the lid off!"

The doctor remained unmoved. "It *is* about time I was marching," he said, "but your case interests me. However, somebody else is coming apparently."

He walked over to the window. "Taxi," he remarked. "Nobody for you, I imagine. Well, good-bye, old man. I've not been kidding you."

George grunted an acknowledgment without looking up, and the doctor left the room. No sooner had he gone than George tore off the page that contained the offensive paragraph, crumpled it into a ball, and threw it into the fire.

"Patched it up with the girl, after all she made him suffer," he muttered. "The sentimental young fool! Jilted, too! And crawls back on his belly like a whipped puppy that whines to be taken on to his mistress's lap again! I thought better of the lad. A fine idiot I shall look when Nell comes to hear of it! But she shan't. I'll wipe the silly ass off the slate."

He was sincere enough, but his mind was rebellious and memory after memory pressed forward to dispute the process of annulment. How heartbroken the lad had been when he made his first confidences! How impervious to ridicule and cynicism and how responsive to sympathy! It was sympathy that he had given him—real sympathy, which is understanding based on experience. And Frank had never admitted that the wound had healed and left no scar, but his closed lips had encouraged the belief that it was so: that

Agnes would soon be forgotten and his boyish love for her become a mere episode of his youth.

George lingered on these memories, and then turned his thoughts to his own misbegotten scheme, which he had planned with such earnestness and enthusiasm that it now seemed like an act of ingratitude and inconstancy for the boy to fail him : to reconcile himself to the old love without even looking upon the new.

That the boy had never heard of the scheme, and that Nell's engagement had rendered it unworkable even if he had, were factors of which he took no account in his mood of unreasonable disappointment. If he had analysed his mind, he would have had to admit that he was not even yet wholly reconciled to the thought that Nell was to marry the gardener's son. It did not grieve him now, for he was on excellent terms with Tom, who was a very decent young fellow indeed ; but he had secretly harboured the hope that Frank would turn up one of these days and let Nell see what a fine chance she had thrown away : what a fine catch her father had planned for her. He had gone so far as to hope that Frank would justify his prediction by at once falling head over ears in love with the girl, and in that way prove to Nell that her father was not the sentimental old fool she no doubt took him to be. It had pleased him to persuade himself that Nell would view the newcomer with an approving and half-envious eye. How could she do otherwise ?

He glared at the window as he pursued his thoughts, knowing all the time that they were selfish and ridiculous. There was nothing to be seen but a sky of varied greys—long drawn out wisps of grey cloud lying in parallel lines athwart a great expanse of lighter grey—but as he looked the sun broke through one of the wisps, and every cloudlet shone with the radiance of polished silver. The light caught the mirrors in the wardrobe, and was reflected on to the bed. One ray leaped on to the torn newspaper that was stretched before him and lit up a sentence in the leading article which attracted his eye.

"Goethe was of another opinion. He saw no reason why our affections should continue when everything in the world is subject to change, yet it remains true that constancy is the basis of all the virtues——"

George read no more, but leaned back against his pillows. "Constancy the basis of all the virtues." Was he—*he*—to blame a man for his constancy? Another scene rose before his eyes. A sky slashed with scarlet and gold. A belt of trees on the edge of the prairie. A sheet of water in which trees and sunset were mingled so that it almost seemed as if huge logs had been flung down into infernal fires. Two men sitting on the trunk of a fallen tree, their axes between their knees, their arms and chests bare, and sweat upon their faces. One man was in his early twenties, in the pride of his manhood, and his eyes were bright.

"I love her, dad, as Dante loved Beatrice; as you love your Rosie——!"

George firmly rang down the curtain on the vision; but his heart softened. "God bless the lad!" he said. "I suppose he knows his own heart best."

The sun dropped behind the clouds again; the mirror became a tame reflector; the newspaper a dull sheet of printed paper; but the soft light remained on George's face.

There was a strange silence about the house—a most unusual silence. He wondered why Mary had not come back—or Nell. If they would come, he would impart the good news the post had brought him. He would laugh with them over his sentimental folly; tell them how he had thrown the offending sheet into the flames. Every moment or two he glanced towards the door which the doctor had closed behind him. Why had the silly fool closed the door?—he might have heard footsteps in the corridor if it had been left ajar. Why the tarnation did not somebody come and share his satisfaction?

Very quietly the door opened, and a woman's figure

appeared—an unfamiliar figure. She came in with bent head and closed the door behind her. Then she looked up and across the room to the man who was staring at her with eyes that were sunk deep in a white face ; but she did not speak.

" Rosie ! " he whispered in a hoarse, uncertain voice.

She laughed, mirthlessly and with constraint, remaining with her back to the door. Her eyes were frightened, but she kept them fixed on her husband, and they contained a challenge.

" I told you I should very likely come back," she said in a voice that was between sobbing and laughter. " I told you I might ask to be made one of your hired servants."

He made no reply ; she could not even be certain he had heard ; but his hungry eyes ate into her very soul. " Rosie ! " he gasped again.

His pallor frightened her, and she went up to the bed and stood beside him.

" I've been an awful rotter, George ! " she said ; but he had bent down over her hand and was kissing it——

* * * * * * *

" Well," said Mercy to Mrs. Turner, when circumstances allowed them to sit down together in the kitchen and drink a cup of tea ; " it's an old saying that ' all's well that ends well,' but whether this is an ending or a beginning, it'll take time to tell. There have been a deal o' sermons preached on prodigal sons coming home, but I never yet heard one on a prodigal wife. One thing is plain to be seen, and that is that she hasn't come back in rags ; and whether or no she's confessed that she's sinned against heaven and in her husband's sight and is no more worthy to be called his wife, is between them two selves."

Mrs. Turner merely smiled, and Mercy went on :

" It seems to be working out same as in the parable, for if there isn't a fatted calf to be killed there's a couple o' ducks to be cooked ; and if they don't eat and be

merry, it'll be because they don't bring an appetite to their food. As for Mrs. George, I warrant she'll find the best robe and rings somewhere."

"Poor thing!" said Mrs. Turner. "Her face tells that she's suffered, and it must be hard to come back to Gapstone and know it doesn't belong to her."

"Yes, but that's where it is, you see," Mercy replied. "It's as old Solomon said hundreds o' years ago—'Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands'; and you can't both eat your cake and have it in your larder, Martha."

"It's lucky for her she's found such good friends," said Mrs. Turner. "This Mrs. Raymond and her son are real gentlefolk, and have been friends in need both to Mr. George and his wife. Nell tells me that as soon as Mr. George left them the old lady set to work to find his wife—but you'll have heard all about it, maybe?"

"I've heard nothing," Mercy replied. "I've been over throng to hear anything. All I was told was that this old lady and her son had brought Mrs. George home, and that there were so many beds to be aired and meals to be cooked that Mercy Mee must throw all down at home, and even take her hands out of the very dough, to run up to Gapstone and give you a lift——"

"I'm sure, Mercy," broke in Mrs. Turner, in contrite tones, "Nancy and I are very much beholden to you, and I feel quite ashamed to think of the trouble we've put you to."

"Trouble's as a body looks at it," replied Mercy. "If Mary hadn't sent for me, I'm that ill-grained and bad to please, I might have sulked for days, besides which I haven't lived with those two all these years without knowing their ways. Mr. George never did them any good that I can see, unless it was when he threw Nell on to their laps, but they're of the old King's mind—'if thine enemy hunger, feed him!' Believe me, Martha, the coals of fire those two have

heaped on Mr. George's head 'ud have burned any ordinary man to a cinder."

"I can well believe it; and yet, poor gentleman, he's suffered more than ordinary men, I fancy," returned Mrs. Turner sympathetically.

"I aren't newsy, but I like to know," said Mercy. "You were going to tell me about the old lady when my tongue went a-galloping."

"Nell had mentioned before," said Mrs. Turner, "how these two had taken to Mr. George. He'd saved the young gentleman's life, it appears, and the old lady couldn't do too much for him. But it grieved her to think he'd parted with his daughter, and it was they who persuaded him to come home. Well, he'd no sooner got away than they set to work to find his wife, and it was a bit before they traced her. The friends she went to when she left her husband——"

"Friends!" interrupted Mercy, closing her lips tightly upon the word and nodding her head.

"Those she had thought her friends," continued Mrs. Turner, ignoring the protest; "had dropped her long ago, and she was with a theatre company that travelled from one place to another, making just a bare living, and nothing more. But they'd a job to persuade her to come away. She said it didn't stand to reason that any decent man would have her back."

"And no more it does," said Mercy, with emphasis; "but love doesn't stand to reason, as I said to a young fellow more years ago than I care to reckon up when he wanted to do sums to see what it 'ud cost to keep both a wife and his 'bacca. However, I'm standing between you and your tale."

"Nell says she doesn't think anybody could resist the old lady, and she got her way in the end. What has passed between her and Mr. George, I couldn't say, of course."

"To be sure you couldn't," returned Mercy; "but her name's Rosie, and so is her nature; and that old thorn-bush of a husband'll prick anybody but her. He'll welcome her back, you'll see, same as a thorn

welcomes roses when winter's past. Some men are that way, and the more they bluster the more a woman can put 'em in her pocket. Look at Samson! A man that could do no end o' mischief with the jawbone of an ass, but was soft as butter before the jawbone of a worthless woman."

"It will be a big change, I fear, Mercy, both for Mr. George and his wife. All their money gone——!"

"'He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man!" said Mercy. "I've told you before, Martha, that when your tart's eaten it's eaten; but when a man has a brother like Roger, he's a special providence alongside of him that watches over him like an angel. Roger's filled their bucket oft enough before, and he'll be soft enough to fill it again, you'll see."

CHAPTER XXXI

IN WHICH THE STORY IS BROUGHT TO AN END

THERE was nothing modern about the dining-room at The Sycamores—nothing that was not hopelessly middle-class and Victorian. All that Roger had thought about had been usefulness and comfort. The furniture was plain, solid, substantial—the sideboard particularly so. The big mirror that covered most of the wall-space above the mantelpiece was framed in gilt. A green tablecloth hid the nakedness of the mahogany table's thick but shapely legs, and at the four corners almost touched the red Turkey carpet, which showed signs of wear in places. The roomy, old-fashioned chairs stood as firmly and moved as easily as in the days of their youth, when they had first been upholstered in plush; and plush still served their purpose. Chenille curtains with a valance of the same material framed the window, where a few vigorous aspidistras led a sheltered existence. There were hassocks at the side of the hearth, and tastefully-embroidered antimacassars on the backs of the easy chairs. The wall-paper had a pattern—unobtrusive and unobjectionable enough in its way, but still a pattern. All the same, when merry flames danced in the grate, as on this frosty December morning, no man, and not many women, would have denied that it was an attractive scene of homely comfort. Roger wanted nothing better. All the happiest associations of his life centred around his home and made

it a sacred place, a temple. He looked across at Mary, whose tea was growing cold in the cup, and smiled as he munched his toast. Very occasionally his wife's unoccupied hand stole to her plate, and broke off a piece of toast, which it conveyed mechanically to her mouth, but her eyes were never raised from the closely written sheets.

"Floss doesn't write so often," Roger remarked at length, "but when she does make a start, she puts her back into it. Why, lass, it's a Quarterly Review she's sent you!"

The words must have reached Mary's ears, but scarcely her consciousness, for she did not even smile, and with a chuckle Roger returned to his bacon.

"Nay, come, lass!" he began again when another sheet was laid on those which already made a heap on the table; "your tea'll be as cold as tap-water. Give it a rest till you've finished!"

"Florence has had a long letter from Edie," said Mary, as she dropped the last sheet on to the pile, and poured the lukewarm tea from her cup into the slop-basin. "They're leaving Carr Hall, so what you've heard, Roger, is true. Jim has bought an estate near Bournemouth, and will go there as soon as ever it can be got ready. Just listen to this."

"I'll listen to naught till you've drunk a cup o' warm tea," he said, and Mary smiled.

"Bother the tea!" she replied, as she raised the cup to her lips. "Floss has some quite exciting news——"

"It'll keep," said Roger.

"You are a tyrant!" laughed Mary.

"Why shouldn't I read it for myself?" Roger asked.

"Because then it would be your breakfast that would be spoiled," she answered. "Now listen:

"'I have had a long, mournful letter from Edie. She says James is far from well and fearfully depressed; and she cannot understand why a good man should have so many afflictions. Rosie's home-

coming and reception seem to have been the last straw. He thinks George ought to divorce her, and that forgiveness ought not to be carried to the fanatical length of renewed co-habitation, and Edie is quite of the same opinion. They are agreed that it is a disgrace which is bound to affect the whole family and produce a state of discomfort that a man in James's position cannot but find intolerable. He is determined to get right away from a locality where he will be constantly reminded of the family's humiliation, and so has bought a small estate in Hampshire, not far from Bournemouth—— ' "

Mary looked across at Roger, and found him more amused than distressed.

" I'm sorry, Roger," she said.

" Are you ? " he replied. " Well, I'm glad. Jim's been lying on a bed o' nettles this many a year, and a bed of Hampshire downs'll maybe suit him better. There'll none be so many flags at half-mast when he flits, I fancy."

" It won't mean the closing-down of the works, I'm glad to find," continued Mary. " Edie says he thinks the Textile Syndicate will take it over."

Roger laughed. " She isn't just up-to-date there. He did think so, once over, but he doesn't now. There's no end to poor Jim's afflictions."

Mary looked across inquiringly.

" Then you know all about this, Roger ? "

" Aye, there isn't much that I miss, lass. There are lots of little birds that come and whisper in my ear, and one of them told me a while back what was in the wind, and I wasn't over well pleased. You see, Jim never gave a thought to Brook and Wood, who've managed the business for him ever since the old man died ; and it was a rotten trick to approach the Syndicate without ever saying a word to them, when there'd have been no business to dispose of if Jim had had to run it.

" Well, when they heard what was going on, they told him they'd a scheme for taking it over if he'd

give 'em a bit of time to look round ; but he choked 'em off before they'd well started, and advised 'em to look out for another job."

Roger paused, and looked across at Mary with a twinkle in his eyes. "Well?" she said.

"Well," he replied, "Jim's bothered with weak wits and a short memory. He'd forgotten a clause in the old man's will that says the business can't be disposed of without the consent of both brothers, either of whom has the first option of purchase. When Cluttertons pointed this out to Jim, he said he thought George had forfeited all such right when he left the firm, but that's a point George had watched. So just as a matter of form, you know, they gave George the option and—he's bought the business!"

Mary looked at him with disapproval in her eyes, but remained silent.

"It caps you," said Roger, with a solemn face, "to know how he's managed it—how a chap without brass can buy an expensive concern like Wainwrights —but, bless you, it's a thing that's done every week. It's brains a man wants, not brass——"

"And we all know that George is remarkable for brains," Mary broke in with gentle sarcasm. "What has made you do it, Roger? You're always saying that you've had enough and will ease off a bit, and now you take over this burden that is bigger than ever."

"Nay, lass," said Roger, "I've taken naught much on this time except that I've lent 'em my brains and invested a fair bit o' brass. There's naught I like better than a game that's fairly played; but when I saw Jim's move, it was a temptation I couldn't resist to put his king in check. And, you see, there was another thing. George may live a matter of two or three years, by what Herbert says, and it'll give him a bit of his self-respect back to be chairman of Wainwrights, Limited, and have a salary, and be able to potter about the mill a bit. And with Brook and Wood as managing directors, things'll go on smoothly

and there'll be naught much for me to do. And if we work on profit-sharing lines——"

"*Well*" said Mary, with emphasis.

"Well, just keeping an eye on 'em for a year or two, you know, till they've got nicely started," he said soothingly, and with a note of apology. "It'll take a biggish part of what capital I've got; but if we're poor "—laughter rippled in his eyes and spread to his cheeks—"we'll try to be honest; and if we should happen to become rich, we'll try to be humble—"

"Roger," said Mary, "people say James is a hypocrite, but you're a bigger, for you'd try to hide your true self even from your wife. Poor! You could never be poor! If mills and motor-cars and butterscotch were all to go to smash in a heap, and you were to lose every penny you possess, you'd still be the richest man in Airedale. Mercy is always saying that 'a good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.' Look how the workpeople adore you!"

"Cupboard love!" he interposed, with a laugh.

"Hypocrite!" she replied. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself to libel them like that! They love you because you love them and let them know that you love them. I'm a very ordinary woman, Roger, but I've always had eyes that have seen through you, and I see through you now. Roger, you've made me a very happy woman all my days, and I'm so proud of you!"

With one impulse the two rose, and Roger wound an arm about his wife's waist and laid his head against hers as she rested it on his shoulder.

"Eh, my lass!" he said, as he pressed her tightly to him, "it was a true word when you said I was the richest man in Airedale. I am. I've made brass fast, and fortune's come to me whenever I've hooked my finger, but there's something bigger and better than brass. There hasn't been a day since we were wed when I haven't thanked God for the best of all His

gifts, and that's you. If I'd had a wife like yon poor broken creature of George's, or a bit o' draped wax like Edie, I should have been poor if every sixpence I have had been a sovereign. Poor!—aye, and miserable, too. There hasn't been a happier man in England than me, and there isn't at this minute. Why, lass, when I've been tempted, now and then, to step on to the shady path, two things have held me back. The first has always been the thought of you——"

"Not the first, Roger, dear!"

"The first!" he reiterated. "You'll say it should have been God, but it hasn't—it's been you. I might have risked it an odd time or two with Him, but I dursen't grieve you."

He could feel the heaving of her bosom, but she did not speak and he kissed her brow.

"Why, lass," he went on, "you've made this little house of ours the grandest home on earth. I've wondered sometimes if I couldn't have done more for you, when I think how Jim's given his wife a handle to her name and filled the house with servants, and how poor George has spent thousands on thousands to give his wife pleasure—not that either of them knows what pleasure is."

Mary pressed the hand that held her, but remained silent.

"You and me live in the same little house we started out in," he continued, "and you wear the same sort o' clothes so far as I can see. And you still help Mercy to wash up, now and then, and make the beds and go round with a duster, and put coal on the fire with your own fingers. And it isn't as if we were pinched for brass, and couldn't afford two or three housemaids and a butler——"

"Don't, Roger!" said Mary, in a low voice.

"Nay, but I'm serious. I wonder sometimes if I haven't been a bit selfish and thoughtless. What can I do for you, lass, to try to pay you back for all you've done for me?"

"What you've always done," she whispered. "It's all I want. Just go on loving me!"

Their lips met in a lover-like kiss, and again it was Roger who spoke.

"Do you know you are fifty years old, Mary Laycock," he said as he held her from him, "and carrying on as if you were Nell's age, and me a young fellow like Tom? I wonder what they'd think if they saw us!"

"They're not going to see us," she replied. Her eyes were moist and bright, and her cheeks were flushed. "But if they did it wouldn't matter very much. I only hope they will be as happy."

"They've the same chance," he said. "You are really contented, Mary?"

"This is home," she answered. "Only duty would take me away from a place where I have been so happy."

He kissed her again. "We've no ambition, lass," he said. "We're back numbers, you and me: willing to let well alone."

"You didn't say what was the other thing that held you back when you were tempted," Mary remarked; "but I know. It was—*that*."

She turned her eyes on the picture; and Roger, with his arm still about her waist, leaned back against the side-board and looked up at it.

"Yes, he's been a queer sort of pal, has that young chap. I liked him, but I couldn't get rid of him. He'd something to say, and he was always whispering it in my ear. But he's fiddled his tune out, and I don't care much for his ghost. There's something queer about the eyes, Mary, since those London folks put it right."

"I see no difference," said Mary.

"Don't you?" he replied. "Well, it's maybe imagination, but to me the man is a ghost now—not flesh and blood."

"Do you know what I should like you to do with it, Roger? Send it to the picture gallery in the park.

It troubles me now, not because it is a ghost, but because it brings up memories I want to lose. I see George slashing it whenever I look up——"

"Then it shall go to Keeley," said Roger. "It's getting on my nerves, too, and I didn't know I had any. Tom shall arrange for it to be hung down yonder."

Mercy entered at that moment, and seemed a little confused when she observed their attitude.

"I thought you must have forgotten to ring, you've been that long over your meal," she explained.

"We've been sweethearting a bit, Mercy," said Roger. "I've been telling Mary she dresses like an old frump, and that's a fact, isn't it?"

Mercy recovered her equanimity. "Her dress ails naught as far as I can see," she replied stoutly, "and if it did, you've got to remember there's different sorts o' dresses. You'll not have forgotten, I daresay, what old Solomon said about the woman whose price was far above rubies—that 'strength and honour are her clothing.'"

"Right you are, Mercy!" laughed Roger. "I've been telling her something like that, too. But I've a hazy sort of notion that the lady you speak of was clothed in silk and purple."

"And if she was," retorted Mercy, "it doesn't follow that she wore them where they showed!"

"Come," said Mary; "I'll help you to clear away."

FINIS

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